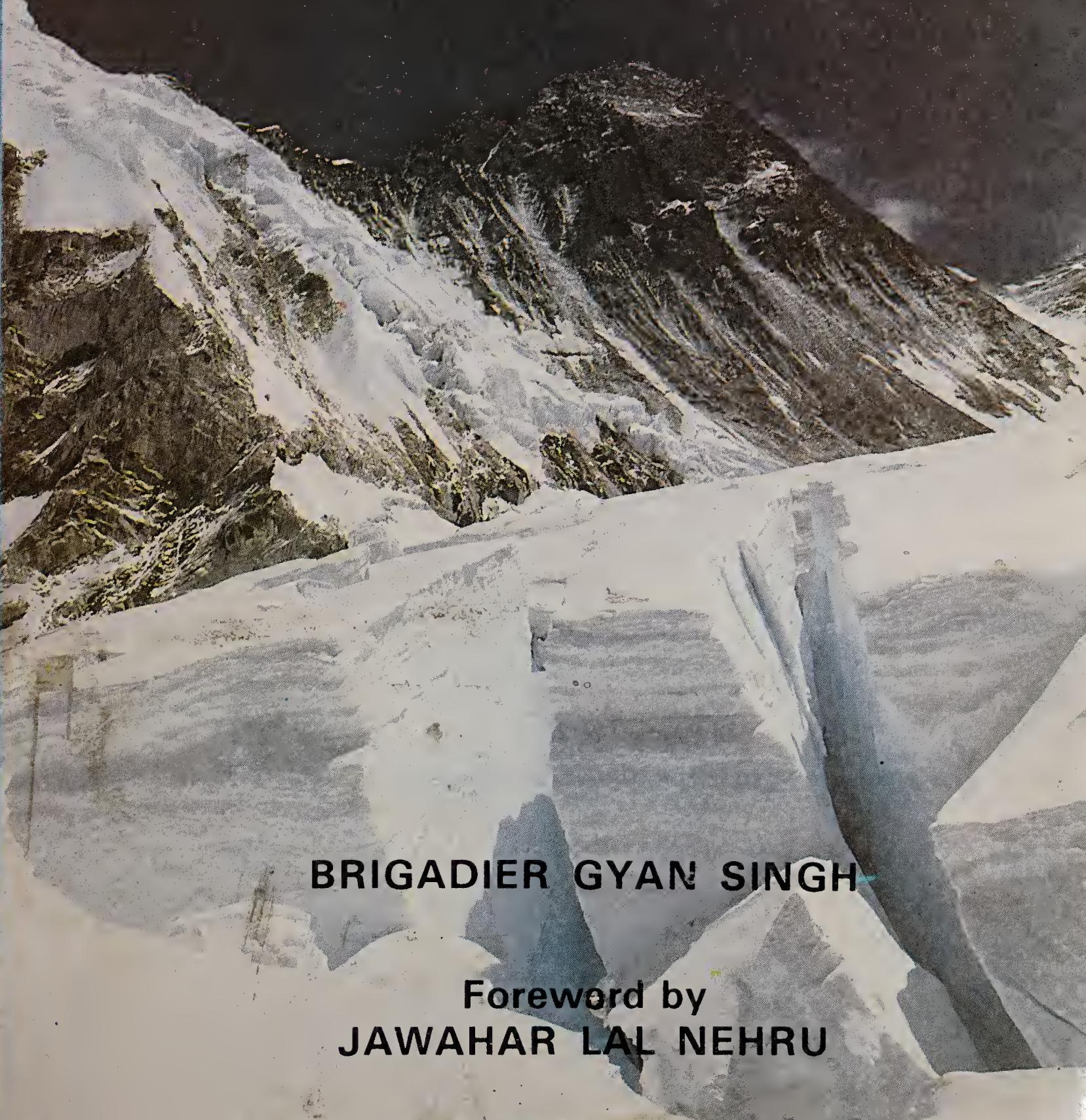


LURE OF EVEREST

STORY OF THE FIRST INDIAN EXPEDITION



BRIGADIER GYAN SINGH

Foreword by
JAWAHAR LAL NEHRU

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PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING
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FOREWORD

The *Lure of Everest*, the call of the high mountains, the quest of the almost unattainable, what is that draws, generation after generation, all mountaineers, to this brave and dangerous adventure? Great mountaineers have sought an answer to this question and found no adequate one. All they could say was that they felt this call and tried to answer it. Is it some part of the eternal quest of man, some overflow of that vital energy which has kept humanity going from age to age in its attempt always to reach some higher peak of human endeavour? If, unfortunately, that vital spark became dim and the call was not heeded, perhaps the journey henceforth would be downhill.

I have often wondered how far the tremendous advances in science and technology, resulting in the human element being progressively replaced by mechanical devices, might not weaken the spirit of man and make him too much of a slave to the mechanical devices he himself has created. Probably not, as there is something unconquerable in that spirit which has survived innumerable follies in the past. Even if the conquest of Everest becomes a normal adventure, there will always be higher Everests to climb; even if, at some distant date, this earth of ours becomes rather common place and without mystery, there will always be other peaks to climb, other worlds to reach.

There will be no lack of adventures of the mind and body for those who are prepared to venture into uncharted seas and climb unknown peaks of human endeavour.

There are many books on mountain climbing with all their accounts of risk and danger and success and failure. As we go up higher, our picture of the world changes and we live in a different world. Sometimes we lose even the clarity of our minds in the strange conditions that we experience. But the call continues to come and the spirit of man is ready to respond to it.

Here is another book about the Himalayas with their crowning peak and a very gallant attempt, bravely carried out. To talk of success or failure in reaching the peak has no doubt some signifi-

cance, and yet it has no great meaning. The story worth telling and worth listening to is the story of the effort, of dangers faced and overcome, of the camaraderie of those who jointly undertook this great task and of the close communion with these high peaks and mountain regions, where silence ever dwells and human beings come out of their little shells and have glimpses of some of the deeper mysteries of nature.

As I followed, through the frequent reports that we used to get, the course of Brigadier Gyan Singh's team, I shared with them, though of course in a much smaller degree, the excitements of the journey and I felt a little envious of these fortunate persons who were trying to climb up Everest. How I would have liked to be with them if only I had been younger and other obstructions had not come in my way!

This story is not a tale of defeat but rather of daily triumph over the difficulties encountered. I am sure that each one of this team is much the better for the unique experience and will treasure this memory always. It may be that the call to go up again will come to them; if so I am sure they will be eager to respond to it.

These Himalayan mountains have attracted people from afar, and indeed it is the people from other countries who have braved them before an Indian team went up. Even so, the Himalayas are not only near to us, but very dear also for they have always been a part of our history and tradition, our thinking and our poetry, our worship and our devotion; they are in our blood and are a part of our make-up. Though trained mountaineers did not organise expeditions in the past from India, innumerable pilgrims have wandered about their peaks and valleys and often spent years in deep thought there. For, according to our mythology, they are the abode of the gods.

We approach them therefore, as old friends who have guarded us and directed our gaze upwards. We do not go out to "conquer" them, but rather to visit an old friend, about whom we have thought for long, and pay our homage to them.

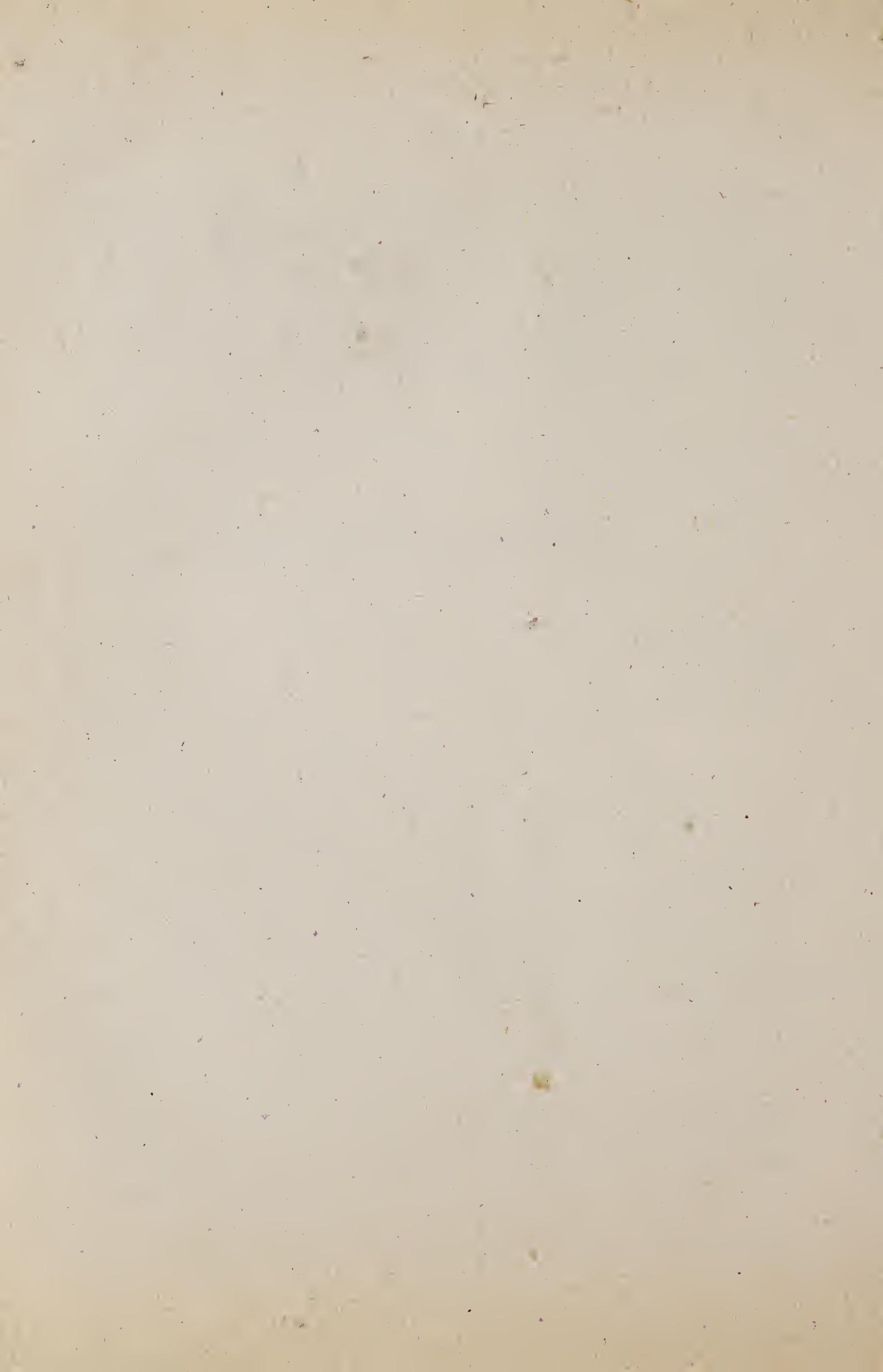
Trained mountaineering has not been popular in India in the past but among the many new things that are coming to the mind of India

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in the present age, this lure of the mountains is one. I have welcomed it and I have taken much pleasure in my association with the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute which itself was the outcome of the climb to the Everest peak by Hillary and Tenzing. The spirit and the lure of the Himalayas is spreading now all over India among our young people, and that is a sign and a symbol of the new life and the new spirit that is coursing through India's veins.

Jaushkarl Nehru

Bombay,
January 1, 1961



PREFACE

This is the story of the first Indian expedition to Everest. It is difficult to say what exactly draws men to the mountains, but those of us who were privileged to be associated with the expedition will never be able to forget the rugged grandeur and beauty of the Himalayas as we journeyed towards Everest. It is true that our failure to reach the summit was a disappointment to us, and perhaps to many others who followed our fortunes with keen interest. Nevertheless, if I may say so in all humility, it was a moving experience, a great adventure, and a great expedition. Everest is no longer inviolable. It has been climbed more than once, and many more attempts will be made by mountaineers all over the world to reach the top. It is possible that other mountaineers will succeed in their attempt. I am certain, however, that despite the success of future expeditions, the lure of Everest will ever beckon mountaineers to attempt what for long seemed the impossible.

Ours was the first attempt by an all-Indian expedition to reach the top of the world's highest peak; and for the first time, the bulk of the equipment used was of Indian manufacture. On this and other accounts the story of the expedition is worth telling.

It is, however, one thing to climb a mountain and quite another to write about it, specially for me as most of my life, I have been a soldier and have done hardly any writing. There is no doubt that left to myself, I would not have written this book. The idea originated with some members of the Sponsoring Committee of the expedition, and in its writing I have received the most generous help and encouragement from the Committee and from numerous other friends.

During a short span of five or six years nearly a dozen Indian expeditions have gone to the Himalayas. Our expedition had perhaps a larger number of members than any other known expedition. Also, it cost nearly as much as all other Indian expeditions put together.

Among the expeditions which made attempts on Everest, ours was

the thirteenth. I am not superstitious, and so I had no hesitation in having a team of thirteen climbing members. With a physiologist, a doctor, a meteorologist and other technical and administrative personnel, there were 23 members in all and 55 Sherpas. Nearly 19 tons of baggage was transported for which more than 700 porters were recruited from Jaynagar. A team of three climbers reached a height of 28,300 ft. Seven Sherpas reached Camp VII at a height of 27,600 ft. and four climbers and 33 Sherpas reached the South Col (26,000 ft.).

The fury of elemental forces thwarted the attempts of our summit teams and deprived us of the glory of success; but it has given us invaluable experience. The expedition has returned rich in knowledge, not only of mountaineering techniques, but useful scientific data on high-altitude physiology, meteorology, wireless communications and a number of other subjects connected with mountaineering.

As young mountaineers we would be failing in our duty were we not to acknowledge the fact that if our team reached a height of 28,300 ft. it was, as Sir John Hunt has aptly put "on the shoulders of previous Everesters". I have valued very much the advice and guidance I have received from Sir John Hunt and Mr. Albert Eggler, both of whom were in touch with me, not only during the planning phase, but even when we were on the mountain. Their letters gave us inspiration when we needed it most.

The weather forecasts of the Meteorological Department broadcast to us through the courtesy of All India Radio were invaluable.

The members of the expedition were fortunate to have received encouragement and assistance from Mr. Humayun Kabir, Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs; Mr. V.K. Krishna Menon, Minister for Defence; Dr. B.C. Roy, Chief Minister of West Bengal; General K.S. Thimayya, D.S.O., Chief of Army Staff and Vice-Admiral R.D. Katari, Chief of Naval Staff. The late Air Marshal S. Mukerjee took keen personal interest in our work and he was a source of great encouragement to all of us. To them and to the Chairman and Members of the Sponsoring Committee we owe a deep debt of gratitude.

The expenses connected with the expedition were largely met by a grant from the Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs.

We are grateful to the Director General of Ordnance Factories for supplying many of the items of equipment and stores for the expedition—some of which were specially manufactured for us in record time; to Lt. Gen. B.M. Rao for guidance and assistance with regard to medical cover; to Lt. Gen. B.M. Kaul and Maj. Gen. W.T. Wilson for several items of equipment. To Maj. Gen. A.C. Iyepa, Director of Signals, we are thankful for his keen interest and help with regard to communications equipment and other facilities for the expedition.

I am deeply conscious of the support I received from my friend and colleague, Tenzing, who was not only a great help in actual organization work and training of the team but also a source of inspiration to us all. I would also like to acknowledge our gratitude to the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research. Having taken a keen interest in starting the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, this organization considered the Indian Mount Everest expedition as their expedition and spared no effort to make it possible. No less was the assistance given by the French Mountaineering Federation of Paris, which helped us in the procurement of equipment from France.

It is my pleasant duty to express my sincere thanks to my friend George Patterson for his constant help and advice in the writing of this book. Mr. H.C. Sarin, a member of the Sponsoring Committee, read the entire book in manuscript more than once and I am most grateful to him for his many suggestions which have resulted in a noticeable improvement in language and presentation.

I would also like to tell the boys who formed the team how much I enjoyed being on the mountains with them. I shall always remember their hard work, friendship and loyalty.

I owe much to my mother for her blessings and to my wife for her support at all times.

Above all we are most grateful to our Prime Minister, Mr. Jawah-

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arlal Nehru, for his most generous interest and encouragement; it has meant so much to us.

Spann

New Delhi,
December 20, 1960

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

Mountains tend to expose man as a puny creature in mother Nature's gigantic scheme of things. We, the members of the first Indian expedition to Everest, with only five or six years of climbing experience behind us, were only too conscious of our mountaineering status and therefore went to our mountains, with a heightened sense of humility and devotion.

Goddess Chomolungma was no doubt kind to us. We had many moments of joy and satisfaction during our climbing as well as our share of trials and tribulations. Towards the last phase of our attempt, we were very optimistic of reaching our goal. It must, however, be accepted that we were mere toddlers in the field of mountaineering and early success would certainly have done no good to the healthy development of Indian mountaineering. As though by a providential plan, the weather gods intervened and snatched away from us success and glory when the cherished summit was tantalisingly within our grasp.

Books are not written on ventures that fail. After the initial shock of the failure, I had consoled myself with the thought that at least I would not have to write a book on our adventure. But the Sponsoring Committee of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation were more than satisfied, and indeed elated at the expedition's performance in all departments of this ambitious project. They had felt that the perfect functioning of the expedition plan and organisation, the development and production from scratch, of sizeable quantities of mountaineering clothing and equipment in India in barely three months and above all the exemplary camaraderie displayed by the young team, in themselves were highly laudable achievements which deserved to be recorded. Therefore there had to be a book.

I had no pretensions about my being a skilled or experienced mountaineer. Everest was my first expedition and indeed the only major one. Equally, I could claim no literary flair or experience. The lack of talent had to be made up by hard work. The result was that the

manuscript of the *Lure of Everest* was ready in less than three months and this first book on Indian Mountaineering was out within six months of the return of the expedition i.e. well before the topicality of the great event was dimmed.

No Indian expedition book has to date come out in such a short time. The credit for this praiseworthy record of production must also be shared by the Publications Division of the I and B Ministry. They handled this job with pleasure, pride and a sense of challenge.

Lure of Everest is primarily the story of our first attempt. But the title suggests that it should be updated to include the exploits of subsequent Everesters.

The second Everest expedition in 1962 was also turned back by the weather and not by the mountain. In 1965 our third expedition put nine men on the top of this highest pinnacle. This remained a record for any nation for 17 years. In our fourth expedition in 1984, Bachendri Pal, a mountaineering phenomenon, became the first Indian woman to scale Everest. The Army expedition in 1985 was singularly unlucky. Five of its strong and experienced mountaineers perished on this ill-fated venture which failed to reach its objective. The lesson from the tragedy: No one can take a mountain for granted because the weather holds the trump card. Man has no expertise or capability to tackle adverse weather. That is indeed the name of the game.

I have already acknowledged in the first edition the valuable help I had received from many friends in organisational work and in writing this book. I would however like once again to express my deep gratitude to the late Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Patron Saint of Indian Mountaineers, for his constant inspiration and encouragement to me. His foreword which is a masterpiece of mountaineering literature is reproduced in this edition. It is, in fact, the most soul uplifting portion of the book.

The excellent line drawings which adorn this book were done by my friend the late C. Douglas, an outstanding and famous artist of Darjeeling. I was deservedly taken to task by a discerning reviewer for not revealing the name of the creator of these line sketches.

The Vice President of India in 1960, the late Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, was yet another eminent personality whom I had the privilege and honour of coming in contact with.

“Bring me thy failure”, the four significant words which he had uttered at the time I was presented to him by the Prime Minister, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru were recommended by me as the title of the book with the story of my memorable encounter with the two eminent personalities forming the opening chapter. The senior members of the Sponsoring Committee were too sensitive to the word “failure” to be linked with India’s first major attempt on the mountains. Therefore, despite the quote’s philosophical connotation and its connection with *Bhagavad Gita*, “Bring me thy failure” as the title of the book and the first chapter under the same heading were dropped.

The sentiments regarding failure and success are no longer relevant now. The first chapter with the heading “Bring Me Thy Failure” as planned by me in 1960, has been brought back in this edition.

April 12, 1986

Amrit Singh

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Bring Me Thy Failure

“Bring me thy failure”, said Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan in his deep resonant voice as he took my hand in his and pumped it vigorously in a hearty handshake.

The occasion was a reception on the afternoon of June 24, 1960 at Teen Murti House. A very happy looking Jawaharlal Nehru was honouring the first Indian expedition to Mount Everest. The members of the expedition, their wives and a large number of distinguished guests including some cabinet ministers and the three Defence Services Chiefs were among those present in the spacious hall on the first floor of the Prime Minister’s house.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad was abroad on a state visit. And so the Vice President, Dr. Radhakrishnan, had been requested to grace the occasion as the officiating Rashtrapati. The Prime Minister had escorted him up to the landing of the staircase where I was waiting to receive the dignitary.

“Bring me thy failure”, an unkind way of greeting, I thought. It seemed to hit me where it hurt most. Having lost over thirteen kilograms in weight on account of severe dehydration on the mountains, I looked emaciated. My suit hung loosely over my bony shoulders. Had I also become overtly sensitive? My lean and gaunt face must have clouded noticeably at the mention of the unsavoury word, Failure.

Jawaharlal Nehru beamed indulgently as Dr. Radhakrishnan, perhaps sensing my discomfiture, patted me on the back and consolingly remarked, “It was a satisfactory show. Your team had done its duty well.”

There was a respectful hush in the big hall as the Rashtrapati entered, followed by the Prime Minister and me. As briefed meticu-

lously by the Prime Minister earlier, I introduced my team members to the Rashtrapati.

It was the turn of the wives of the members of expedition next. He had a word for each one "Ab to aap log khush ho?" (Are you happy now?) asked Jawaharlal Nehru. This provoked a question from the Rashtrapati. "Were you anxious when your husbands were away climbing Everest?" He asked speaking in English. Virtually hypnotised in the presence of the towering personalities, the ladies answered the questions by merely flashing their beautiful and bright smiles.

Harish Sarin thought of breaking the ice by telling an interesting story which was relevant to the occasion. He narrated how he had once received a cabled wireless message in Delhi from the Base Camp of Everest in which I had informed him that I had not been too well for some days on account of dehydration. Among other things, I had specifically requested him not to let my wife know about my illness which I had recovered from any way.

Sarin had just finished reading the message, when Mrs. Gyan Singh came on the trunk telephone line from Darjeeling. "How is my husband, Mr. Sarin? I haven't heard from him for quite some time."

This was the first time Sarin had heard Mrs. Gyan Singh's voice over the telephone. And, in view of my request not to tell her, he hesitated but for a second or so. "Why don't you tell me Mr. Sarin?" Mrs. Gyan Singh insisted impatiently in an emotion-charged voice.

"Why, he is perfectly all right. Do you have any reason to be worried?" Sarin wanted to find out if some one had informed her about my sickness. "No, no I have had no news for a long time. But many times I have had a feeling that he was not well."

There was no point in keeping my message a secret any more and he read it out to her. "Thank God! And thank you very much Mr. Sarin", Mrs. Gyan Singh spoke with an obvious sigh of relief and rang off.

"The message Gyan Singh had sent to me was in cypher." Sarin emphasised suggesting that this could only be a case of telepathy or a

psychic phenomenon. He expected every one to be suitably impressed. Perhaps others were but, not Jawaharlal Nehru. He pricked the balloon with the remarks, "There must have been a leak in your cypher."

Moving away from the group the Rashtrapati started circulating and meeting other guests. My main role in the function was over. But I kept following the chief guest. I could not understand why a man of Dr. Radhakrishnan's eminence would think it fit to remind me of our failure and 'rub salt in the wound' as it were. I wanted to know why he had said it. What was the significance of the remark, 'Bring me thy failure'? So far every one had said only kind things to us.

Within a couple of hours of our breaking the news of our failure to climb Everest, we had received this message from the Sponsoring Committee: "We would like you and the members of the expedition to know how greatly we admire your efforts and we warmly congratulate you on your achievements."

We got similar messages from all and sundry throughout our return journey, and were warmly received and feted at Kathmandu. The welcome to the expedition team at Delhi was indeed touching. The Press, and the public were very indulgent and appreciative of our efforts. 'It was a near success. Almost as good as done'.

But almost is not quite. Such meaningless adulatory observations embarrassed me sometimes. Despite the pats on the back, deep within me something kept reminding me of our failure to make the peak. Nonetheless, the praise and the fuss sounded nice and sweet and I lapped them up with relish. Occasionally I would break out in mock humour and observe, "There was a great danger of my boys making the peak had the weather gods obliged just for another day." The pseudo-héro in me even tried drawing appreciative laughters from my audiences by remarking with affected lightheartedness, "Good job we didn't do it, I would have had to buy a larger size hat."

It took a man of Dr. Radhakrishnan's stature to bring me down to earth and face the reality.

By the time he finished circulating, the Rashtrapati had probably noticed that I was close behind him all the time. He must have known why. He suddenly looked back over his shoulder, smiled and repeated "Bring me thy failure! You want to know the real meaning?" I nodded sheepishly.

Shedding protocol, the Rashtrapati put his hand on my shoulder and led me to the far end of the hall and sat down in a sofa. He shut his eyes in contemplation for a while. He found me standing when he opened his eyes again and patting the sofa on his left, invited me to sit next to him and said "This is from the *Gita*. Have you read the *Gita*?" I said that I had read the story of the *Mahabharata* and knew slightly what the *Gita* was about.

Dr. Radhakrishnan proceeded to describe the philosophical discourse between Lord Krishna and Arjuna. Krishna had tried to impress on Arjuna that to fight the battle was his duty as a Kshatriya irrespective of his sentiments about the blood relationship with the enemy. He was fighting for Truth and Right. He must not shirk his responsibility. Finally Arjuna said that he knew that the enemy was much superior in relative strength and he had no hope of coming out successful. It would then be a defeat of Truth and Right. Arjuna did not wish to be instrumental in banishing Truth from the world.

Lord Krishna then revealed himself as God and commanded, "You go and do your duty in the battle. You need not worry about the outcome. Should you fail, bring your failure as offering to me."

The Rashtrapati rose from the sofa abruptly and asked me to see him later in his house. He would then tell me more about it.

प्राशुलभ्ये फले लोभादुद्वाहुरिव वामनः

Like a dwarf with upraised hands desirous of fruit fit for a giant.

—KALIDASA

2

The Birth of the Idea

On June 30, 1959 at 10 a.m., I landed at Santa Cruz Airport in Bombay on my way to attend an International Mountaineers meet at Chamonix in France and a similar meet at the Swiss School of Mountaineering at Rosenlaui. I was going to these meets on behalf of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute to acquaint myself with the latest mountaineering techniques. As I was going abroad I expected to meet a few friends. I was not surprised to see some enthusiasts who were planning to run local rock climbing courses the following winter. There were some dozen people including Keki Bunshah and Navnit Parekh waiting for me. After the usual handshakes and welcome smiles, Keki Bunshah took me by the arm and hustled me into his car. Someone asked for my baggage ticket which I handed over. They all seemed to be in such a hurry that I almost felt I was being kidnapped. Only after Keki's old Austin had been speeding away towards Bombay for some time did he tell me that Mr. S.S. Khera was leaving from Bombay Central Railway Station in about half an hour and that he wanted to see me. It all seemed so mysterious to me, but Keki would not satisfy my curiosity. He just said that I would know everything by and by.

I had met Mr. Khera in Delhi in January 1959 for the first time in connection with the remnants of some equipment, left over from the Cho-Oyu expedition, which was to go to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. I had occasions to meet Mr. Khera a number of times since then. Mr. Khera was greatly interested in mountaineering and he was an important member of the Sponsoring Committee of the proposed expedition to Mount Everest. But I did not know what was coming.

In between keeping his attention on the traffic and trying to talk to me, Keki asked me if I would help him in carrying out certain investigations in Europe regarding equipment for an Indian Everest expedition. While promising all help, I warned him that I had very little money for my stay on the Continent. Navnit Parekh, who was sitting in the back seat of the car, hastened to tell me that they had already budgeted for it, and that I would be helped with the necessary foreign exchange. Every few minutes Keki would look at his watch and then furtively look round to make sure that there were no traffic policemen about. He would then step on the accelerator. We came across a few traffic hold-ups and had to make some detours, which delayed us further.

After a bone-shaking and anxious ride in the car we reached Bombay Central Railway Station just five minutes before the train was due to leave. We jumped out of the car and sprinted to the platform. With difficulty we found Mr. Khera, who was very happy to see us. There were now only two or three minutes left for the train to pull out.

“What are the possibilities of everything going through?” asked Mr. Khera. I did not quite understand what he meant but had just time enough to assure him that I would do my best for the expedition in Europe. As he entered the compartment, Mr. Khera wished me *bon voyage*, smiled and said, “That is fine. Now get on with it. I want to see results.” The train pulled out and Keki gave a big sigh of relief. I started to breathe again.

After the successful Cho-Oyu expedition which was led by Keki Bunshah, he had kept in touch with the Sponsoring Committee regarding the Indian Mount Everest expedition. Not much had been done in 1958. In early 1959, however, Keki started prodding the Sponsoring Committee. Mr. Khera was the key member of the Sponsoring Committee of the Cho-Oyu expedition, but for many reasons he was not able to say anything definite regarding the Indian expedition to Mount Everest.

At this stage Keki had no official status either on the Sponsoring Committee or on the expedition. But he was keen and determined

man. When Keki is interested in a project he makes sure that no one connected with it is ever likely to forget about it. The members of the Sponsoring Committee, who were senior officers in the government and very busy people, saw a lot of Keki. Keki had already started making enquiries in Europe and India about equipment. He was looking ahead. I now knew why he had kidnapped me from Santa Cruz.

Keki and Navnit were also beginning to breathe normally. I had grasped the general idea of what was required of me but on the way to my residence Keki outlined his proposals. Even at this stage it was evident to me that I would be kept very busy in Europe. But Keki had not yet finished with me. Putting his hand into his pocket he drew out several sheets of paper. While looking at these papers he suddenly woke up to the fact that he was going straight into a cyclist. He swerved violently. As I proceeded to place the papers in my pocket, Keki insisted that I read them right away. Without further protest I opened out the closely typewritten notes under the heading "Notes for Colonel Gyan Singh (prepared by Keki Bunshah)". There were over a hundred points in all, with numerous sub-headings.

Point No. 1 read: 'In Paris try and see as many of the firms hereinafter mentioned (Keki is a solicitor) whose names are marked with blue pencil, in connection with various problems, and get from them three copies each of all catalogues, price lists, circulars and other literature in connection with the manufacture, specifications, results on expeditions etc. etc.' This was followed by a formidable list of numerous firms not only in Paris but all over Europe, and nearly all of them were marked in blue pencil. In quite a number of cases only the names of the firms were given but Keki had not omitted to advise: 'The addresses of the various firms marked with blue pencil, in cases where they are not mentioned herein, can be obtained from the *Federation Française de la Montagne* in Paris or from a trade directory at the Indian Embassy.'

The list of mountaineering equipment was exhaustive. For each item I was required 'to see as many firms as possible and discuss particulars like design, specifications, obtain sample material and

find out the specifications of individual components', and so on. There was a complete thesis on each item and invariably there was a definite request like 'obtain the formula of glacier creams from the laboratories'.

'Snow goggles: What is special about the glass? Mode of manufacture?'

'Butane Burners: All different types of cylinders and burners available, their weights, sizes, both when filled and empty.'

'Stoves: What is the material used in Primus stoves? Specifications and design of burners. Material for burners of different sizes.'

'Fruit juice and lemon and orange powder: See different firms and try and get the formulae.'

There were dozens of such items which needed investigation.

I was still going through these papers in the car when we reached my brother's house where I was going to stay for the next two days. We were greeted by my sister-in-law and two nieces. The two little girls had barely five minutes to welcome their uncle when Keki interrupted to ask if he could have a few minutes with me, but it was some hours before they saw me again.

Keki left, promising to return at 5.30 in the evening when he hoped I would be able to talk to him in peace. I could hear muffled protests from my nieces because they had other plans for me. But I explained to them that I ought to attend to work and promised to take them out the next day.

Keki returned punctually and again we talked for a few hours. He had brought with him some more sheets of paper—copies of numerous letters he had written to people in Europe. I was required to see these people and ask them to write back to Keki. While going through the papers later, I discovered that practically every point was very important or urgent or must be given top priority. We had two sessions the next day. By this time he was really unpopular with my nieces and I was shocked to hear Usha, the younger girl, shout out to Keki as he was leaving, "Mr. Bunshah, we don't like you. You talk too

much. Our uncle has no time to talk to us. Please don't come again." My sister-in-law admonished the girl and apologised to Keki.

Next morning the door bell rang at about six. "I bet it is Mr. Bunshaw again," shouted Usha to her sister Asha as she ran to open the door. "Oh, there you are again! But uncle has already left for somewhere," she said, and closed the door. I was shaving at that time in the next room and had to run down to the road in my pyjamas to bring Keki back. Poor Keki, he had a guilty look on his face. As he sat down, he smiled sheepishly at the two frowning girls.

On my way to Europe, I again went through the papers Keki had given me and made out a priority list of my own. This was necessary because if I had tried to attend to all the problems it would have taken me at least three months, and Keki had promised to send me a lot more work when I arrived in Europe.

On reaching Paris, I called at the *Federation Francaise de la Montagne*, which advises mountaineering institutions throughout France and coordinates their activities. This organisation, as well as the French Alpine Club, were very helpful in making arrangements for me to see many of the firms Keki had listed.

I also met Maurice Herzog, the valiant mountaineer who climbed Annapurna-I in 1950. He held an important post in the French Government in the *Haute Commissariate de la Jeunesse et aux Sports* and controlled the training of mountain and ski guides in addition to helping all organisations connected with the youth movement and sports. We had interesting discussions on the value of sports, particularly those with an element of danger, in building up character and bringing out the best in man. Later, Maurice Herzog invited me to the inaugural ceremony of a mountain-hut near Chamonix, which cost the French Government the equivalent of approximately eight hundred thousand rupees. This hut is fully furnished and can house one hundred and twenty mountaineers. I was told that this was perhaps the most well appointed mountain-hut in the world. It took more than a year to build, and nearly 400 helicopter sorties were conducted to transport heavy material to the site.

At the international meet held under the auspices of the French School of Skiing and Mountaineering, I had the opportunity of meeting some of the best Alpinists in the world. I studied the training programme of the school for professional guides and attended their practical technique lessons. There were a number of group discussions, lectures and film shows by some of the world's most renowned guides like Gaston Rebuffat and Lionel Terray. My talk on 'Mountaineering in India' and a film show of 'Call of the Mountains', a documentary on the work of our Institute, was attended by more than 200 people. So interested was the audience in our progress in mountaineering that questions at the end of the lecture lasted more than an hour.

Later, I went to Rosenlaui in Switzerland and met Arnold Glatthard, Principal of the Swiss Mountaineering School and some other international mountaineers. Glatthard had come to Darjeeling in 1954 on behalf of the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research to select the training area for our Mountaineering Institute, not far from the Kanchenjunga massif. He had also trained at his school in Switzerland the late Major N. D. Jayal, my predecessor and the first Principal of the Institute. Tenzing and six Sherpa instructors had also gone to him before starting the Institute at Darjeeling. Glatthard was genuinely happy to know about the work which was being done there.

In Zurich, I called on Mr. Ernst Feuz of the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research. He has done so much for mountaineering in India that I was keenly looking forward to seeing him. As expected, he and the staff of the Foundation went out of their way to help me in my work.

At Berne, I met Albert Eggler, the Leader of the Swiss expedition to Everest in 1956. When Eggler drove me to his house, we were greeted by two fluffy little dogs which were barking their heads off and jumping with excitement on seeing their master. Eggler had brought these dogs from Nepal and was very proud of them. We spent an enjoyable evening together talking about Tenzing, the Himalayas and many other matters. Although a quiet and undemonstrative man, Eggler was visibly moved as he talked nostalgically about the

Sherpas and his stay in our mountains. He spent the whole of the following day showing me round the Alpine Club, the Alpine Museum and the Zoological Park in which most of the animals are kept in their natural habitat.

I left for Vienna in the first week of August and exchanged views with Austrian climbers, including Fritz Moravec who led the Austrian expedition to Dhaulagiri in 1959. Moravec gave me some useful hints on the latest mountaineering equipment.

Except during the mountaineering meets at Chamonix and Rosenlaui, most of my time was spent on work for the Indian Mount Everest expedition. Although I was a little rushed, I was able to cover a lot of ground. My work was made easy by the mountaineers I met and the firms I visited. There was goodwill abounding and I often noticed that the eyes of the young European climbers sparkled with excitement to meet a man from the land of Gandhi, Nehru and the great Himalayas.

In Germany, I went to Munich where Paul Bauer, a famous mountaineer and writer, and his friends showed me the latest rescue equipment for the mountains. Later, after a hurried visit to Bonn and Brussels, I left for England.

During my stay in Europe, Keki wrote me many letters. I could not reply to all of them, but I wrote to him once or twice a week and kept him fully informed of what I was doing.

I was keen to meet Sir John Hunt when I went to London, and hear from him a first hand account of his ascent of Everest. As the Secretary of the 'Duke of Edinburgh Award', he coordinated various youth activities in the U.K. I reached London in the third week of August and got in touch with Sir John who had just returned from a holiday. He invited me to his club for lunch and talked about Tenzing, mountaineering in India, his Sherpa friends and numerous other subjects. Sir John was pleased to hear about our progress in the field of mountaineering. He said he was sorry he could not see more of me because he had been away from London, but wanted me to stay with him at his home at Henley-on-Thames. I had to give a lecture at India

House the next morning which prevented me from accepting his kind invitation.

While talking about mountains, Sir John told me of his visit to Russia in 1958 when he climbed in the Caucasus with some Russian climbers. He mentioned that he had heard that a combined Russian-Chinese team was planning to climb Everest from the north in 1960. He said that he had also heard some talk of an Indian expedition going to Everest and asked me if I had any information. I told him that it was under consideration but, to my knowledge, no definite plans had been made.

Before I left, Sir John asked me if he could attend my lecture the next day, and I said to him it would be a great honour and that I would talk to the organisers of the lecture. On leaving him, I rushed to the office of our Military Adviser. When I entered his office, I heard him say on the telephone : "Certainly, Sir John. We should have informed you much earlier. It is our fault." After ringing off, he turned towards me and said, "Do you know, your audience tomorrow is going to include Sir John Hunt?"

At India House, I collected my mail. Most of the letters were from Keki. I also received a letter from the Secretary of the Sponsoring Committee which said that, at a meeting held earlier in the month, the Committee had chosen me to lead the Everest expedition. Keki was to be the Deputy Leader. Little did I know while talking to Sir John that the letter inviting me to lead the first Indian expedition to Everest was already waiting for me. I had met some members of the Sponsoring Committee from time to time, but no one had given me any indication about my name being considered for the signal honour.

The letter from the Sponsoring Committee produced a strange excitement within me. I could not think what I should do. I was in London, several thousand miles away from home, and there was no one to whom I could talk about this. I had planned to go to a film show that evening, but I could not bring myself to go out. I sat in my room pondering over all kinds of things. Several thoughts came to my mind which, while not important in themselves, now assumed a new significance.

After the return of the Cho-Oyu expedition I had met Capt. Dias in August 1958 in Calcutta. He was a member of that expedition. I knew Dias well. He had worked with me as an Instructor in the Army Ski School in Gulmarg in 1950. We talked about the Cho-Oyu expedition and he later told me that the Sponsoring Committee was planning to send an expedition to Everest in 1960. He suggested that I might lead this expedition. I laughed away the suggestion because, at that time, I had just joined the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and had a lot to learn. Leadership of an expedition to the highest peak in the world—surely there were other people in the country who had better claims for leading such an expedition.

Even during my visit to Europe I was only establishing contacts, obtaining quotations and samples of equipment, and generally collecting information for Keki. All that I was able to gather I sent to him. I did not look at the various other problems as a Leader. In any case I had not accepted the invitation of the Sponsoring Committee yet.

I could not help thinking of all these matters, but I could not make up my mind. I had to consider the many repercussions of my absence from the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. It was a question of being away for more than four months. I had visited many institutions in Europe and learnt about the latest methods and techniques. I had met some of the best mountaineers in the world who had given me good advice. I had come at the expense of the Institute. It was my duty to get back to the Institute and pass on what I had learnt during my trip. I also felt that there was very little time to organise such a big venture. If I did accept, I would not only be physically away from my primary work for more than four months, but would have also to devote many months, both before and after the expedition to its work. Above all, I had to consult my wife and my friend Tenzing.

The invitation to lead the expedition had come from the Sponsoring Committee and I still had to obtain the permission of the Executive Council of the Institute. However, I had a feeling that before writing to me the approval of the Institute authorities must have been obtained. I wrote a letter to Mr. H.C. Sarin who, in addition to being

a member of the Sponsoring Committee, was also Secretary of the Executive Council of the Institute. In my letter I gave him the reasons for my hesitation in accepting the great honour. I wrote to him that I was not quite sure if I had the necessary experience to undertake the task. Having written the letter I felt a bit relieved and left my hotel room for a short walk.

I left London for Paris on my way back home on August 25. In Paris I discovered that, true to his promise, Keki had sent several more letters, including a cable. He wanted me to delay my departure by two or three days so that I might meet Navnit Parekh in Zürich. He suggested that I could brief Navnit on the progress of the work done by me so that he could attend to what I had not been able to do. Unfortunately, it was not possible for me to alter the date of my departure. After a couple of days in Paris I flew to Zurich for a final visit to the Swiss Foundation, and left for Bombay on August 31, 1959.

My plane was more than eight hours late in reaching Bombay and I landed at 2 a.m. on September 2. At the Customs counter I identified my baggage and asked for a clearance. The Customs officer asked me to open my suitcase. Just then I overheard a lady on my left plead to another officer: "I am afraid I have lost my keys." As I fumbled through my pockets the realisation gradually dawned on me that I too had lost my keys and was about to be terribly embarrassed by having to give the same excuse. The Customs officer looked up and saw my embarrassment and asked me if I had anything to declare. The only things I had brought from Europe were some items of mountaineering equipment which I had used in the Alps, and some souvenirs of not more than two hundred rupees in value. I showed him the nylon rope and ice-axes I was carrying; he appeared to be quite interested in the equipment and after a few brief questions about mountaineering let me go.

Keki came to see me early next morning. He apologised for disturbing me so early but when I told him that my two nieces had gone back to their school, he looked visibly relieved. Practically the whole of that day I spent with Keki who cross-examined me thoroughly,

extracting every bit of information. As I was on my way back to Delhi, Keki wanted to know if I had heard from the Sponsoring Committee about the leadership of the expedition. I told him about the letter from the Secretary of the Sponsoring Committee and said I had not quite made up my mind about it.

In Delhi, Mr. Sarin gave me the general background of the planning done by the Sponsoring Committee. There was a panel of three or four names including that of my friend and colleague, Tenzing, who had been Director of Field Training at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute since 1954. Mr. Sarin explained why the Sponsoring Committee was not able to select anyone else from the panel to lead the expedition.

In his usual calm and unemotional manner, Mr. Sarin convinced me, without any hint of persuasion, that it would be in the interest of the expedition as well as of the Institute if I accepted. He said that Tenzing would look after the Institute in my absence. Mr. Sarin promised that he would assist him over any administrative problems, which might arise. I discussed all aspects of the matter with Mr. Sarin, but I withheld my decision until I had consulted my wife and Tenzing.

Mr. Sarin asked me to see Mr. Khera before leaving for Darjeeling. Mr. Khera, who had taken an active part in the initial planning, was happy to see me and wanted to know my reaction to the proposal. He was a little disappointed when I told him that I could give my final decision only after I had reached Darjeeling. I promised to send a telegram about it within three days. I could understand his anxiety; time was running out, and it was already late to start the main work of organising the expedition. Before I left his office, he reminded me that I must send a telegram as soon as I could. As we shook hands he said: "I am not expecting a No."

Tenzing had not returned from Kathmandu when I reached Darjeeling; but he was expected any day. In the meantime I broached the subject to my wife. She thought it was a great honour to be asked to lead a venture of this nature. I was quite encouraged by her reaction.

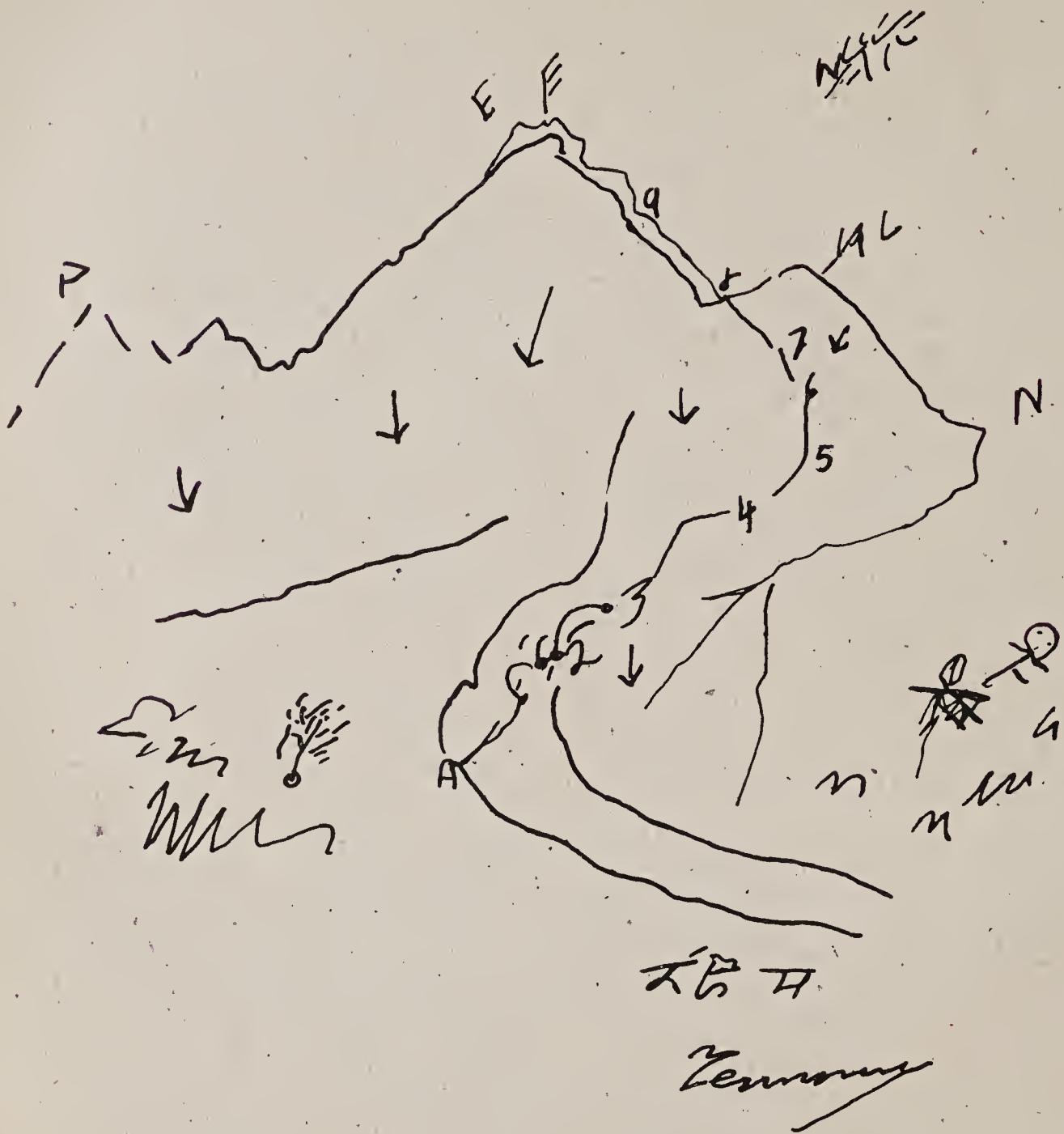
At the same time, I could not help noticing that she looked a little anxious. I knew she was thinking about my personal safety. She had heard about the hazards in the mountains and had not forgotten that 'Nandu' Jayal, my predecessor had gone on the Cho-Oyu expedition in 1958 never to come back. I told her that the anxiety of mothers and wives in such matters was understandable but this must not be allowed to be a deterrent to men. At the end of our discussion my wife finally agreed that I should go.

I had been two days in Darjeeling but Tenzing had not yet returned. When he arrived the next day I spoke to him about the expedition. Normally Tenzing was very quick with his answers and decisions, but this was the first time I heard him say that he would like to think it over. He promised to speak to me the next day. I did not wish to rush him into giving his advice. I had given him the background information and planning of the expedition. I had not forgotten my promise to Mr. Khera. I, therefore, sent him a telegram asking for two more days. Tenzing came to the office the next day, but he did not say anything about the expedition. The following morning he came to the Institute earlier than usual and walked straight into my office with his arms stretched in front of him for a handshake in his characteristic manner. He caught my right hand in both his and with an affectionate handshake and his usual broad grin said: "Bhayya (brother), you accept it. I shall do my best to help you."

I wanted to send a telegram to Mr. Khera immediately, but Tenzing sat down in a chair in front of me and started discussing various aspects of the expedition. He looked very happy and was impatient to tell me what he knew about the mountain. He pulled out some paper and drew a sketch of the Everest area and started explaining the ascent plan straightway. Normally Tenzing was a restless man and it was difficult to make him sit down for any length of time. On this occasion, however, he talked to me for more than two hours, going into every detail—how to tackle the ice-fall and Lhotse Face, the employment of Sherpas and porters, procurement of equipment, do's and don'ts on the march and on the mountain, and hundreds of other details. I hurriedly scribbled notes as Tenzing poured out his

thoughts to me. I was to know later how useful and wise his counsel had been. Tenzing looked almost obsessed with the thought of an Indian expedition going to Chomolungma—the name by which Everest is known to Sherpas. He stopped talking, got up and shook hands with me again. Before leaving the office, he said, "I know you can do it, Bhayya. Best of luck." I was happy. Tenzing's talk had given me confidence. His enthusiasm was infectious and I felt inspired. Such opportunities do not come one's way often. Tenzing—the man of the mountains had said I could do it. I sat in my chair lost in thoughts for many minutes, looking at the door where I had seen Tenzing cheerfully wave his good-bye with the words "Best of luck, Bhayya." I suddenly woke up from my reverie and remembered the promise to Mr. Sarin and Mr. Khera. I sent them telegrams immediately. I was now willing to face the great task.





Tenzing's sketch of the Everest route.

Legend

- A—Base Camp of the British Expedition (1953).
- P—Pumori.
- E—Everest.
- N—Nuptse.
- L—Lhotse.
- 2—9—Camps by the British Expedition (1953).

न विद्यया केवलया तपसा वापि पात्रता।
यत्र वृत्तमिमे चोभे तद्द्वि पात्रं प्रचक्षते ॥

Knowledge or exertion (austerity), each by itself is not enough; it is the combination of both that really makes the right man.

—BHARTRIHARI

3

Preparing for the Expedition

The first lesson one learns from the mountains is that of humility. How many times has man to try to climb a difficult peak before he succeeds! Many are the hazards he has to face and each time, in fact each moment, the mountains present a new hazard. When man does reach the peak, is he really a victor? Is it a conquest? After the 'conquest', can he go to the peak at will? Can he occupy it and remain there? No. Arrogance in the context of the mountains is not justified. It was with a feeling of humility blended with the spirit of challenge that I began to plan for the expedition. In the short time left the task appeared overwhelming.

I was reminded of the Instructor at the Staff College who, while teaching 'Appreciation of a Situation', mentioned that the process of methodical thinking could be applied to planning of any kind. I, therefore, started examining my problems on the lines of a military operation.

Tenzing had given me many ideas which I had jotted down in my notebook. I spent an hour or so thinking of numerous other aspects of planning and after analysing them I listed them under appropriate heads. I became conscious of two major problems ahead of me: firstly, the selection of the team, and secondly, procurement of equipment.

Time was a major factor in my planning. It was a critical factor in our case because the Sponsoring Committee had stressed that, as far

as possible, we should use equipment of Indian manufacture. Indian industry had hardly any experience in making mountaineering equipment.

I had already prepared a provisional list of items of equipment to be manufactured in India and those that had to be imported. However, the detailed work could only be carried out when the team was finalised. It was, therefore, essential that the selection and training of the team should be taken in hand without any delay. It had been decided that the selected young men should be given advanced training and a final selection should be made only on the completion of their training.

As the time was short, I decided that planning for the expedition should be done by the members during the training period. Apart from saving time it would give our young climbers confidence and experience if they had a share in the various processes of planning. It would also lighten my burden.

In October and November 1959, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute was organising an Advanced Course on the Kabru glacier in Western Sikkim. All the twelve vacancies on this Course had already been filled before I returned from Europe. At the request of the Sponsoring Committee, it had been agreed that the Institute would give pre-Everest training along with the Advanced Course. Thus, the Institute had twelve more students on this Course, and together with two students sent by the Army Mountaineering Association for the joint British-Nepalese-Indian expedition to Annapurna II, the Advanced-cum-Pre-Everest Course had twenty-six students.

The Course assembled on the 5th October. Most of the students had already done Basic or Advanced Courses at the Institute. On the Pre-Everest Course there were a number of students who had experience of expeditions and, therefore, could be trusted to shoulder heavier responsibilities. Keki Bunshah was unable to join the Pre-Everest Course due to his professional work, but he and the Secretary of the Sponsoring Committee, Sohan Singh, came to the initial conference which was held when the students attending the Course arrived. At this conference the students were briefed on the various

processes of planning which was one of the subjects of training.

The students were divided into six syndicates (teams) of four or five each. The syndicates were given tasks concerning various detailed aspects of planning for the expedition. They had to work out elaborate lists of clothing and technical equipment, food, portage, movement plan, communications etc. The plan was to consider these problems in detail during the training period on the mountain, and to draw up a coordinated scheme after group discussions when we returned to Darjeeling.

It was clear that after the course the students would disperse to their homes or places of work. The team would be spread out. Therefore, distribution of work among team members had to be clear-cut. It would be impossible for me to give personal attention to every problem and every detail. I, therefore, issued my first planning note, in which responsibilities of the Secretary of the Sponsoring Committee, the Leader, the Deputy Leader and individual members were indicated. Priorities for work were laid down with strict instructions that these must be adhered to. The policy with regard to procurement of equipment from Europe, manufacture by Ordnance factories, and purchase from the trade and Ordnance depots was laid down.

The students left Darjeeling for field training in Western Sikkim on October 11, 1959. Considerable planning work was done by them during the approach march. Every day during the treks, they discussed their plans, and were often seen pulling out reference books from their rucksacks and taking down notes during short halts on the march. After the day's trek, those responsible for handling technical equipment, like oxygen apparatus and wireless sets, discussed their equipment and gave demonstrations. I was very happy to see everyone so keen and enthusiastic. In spite of the fatigue of long treks, practice on technical equipment and syndicate discussions continued till quite late in the evenings. After four days' march through very beautiful country, we reached the village of Yoksom beyond which there was no habitation along our route. Here we took over some high-altitude equipment and clothing from the Basic Course which

was on its way back to Darjeeling after completing its technical training in the mountains.

We reached our Base Camp in seven days without making extra halts for rest or acclimatisation. During the last two days of the march, we had climbed over eight thousand feet. Some of the less experienced students were already beginning to feel the effects of altitude. The next day, we left for the Advance Base Camp and the students, for the first time, stepped on ice. Most of that morning's journey was on a glacier.

After finishing the field training of the preceding Basic Course, Tenzing had moved up with the instructors and some high-altitude Sherpas for the Pre-Everest Course. They had sited the Advance Camp at a height of nearly 16,000 feet at the junction of Ratong and Kabru glaciers. We found Tenzing waiting for us outside his tent. He greeted each one of us with a warm hand-shake and a cheery smile. Mugs of hot tea were brought out. The Instructors and Sherpas recognised some old friends among the trainees. After a tiring journey we found the welcome most heart-warming.

Tenzing and the instructors showed the students the tent sites where the ground had already been levelled. The general layout of the camp was excellent. Temporary kitchens had been put up with stones and tarpaulins; the track connecting the tents, cook houses and store rooms had been lined with stones. Water points and latrine areas were appropriately marked with flags. It was evident that quite a lot of effort had gone into these details. Nothing could have shown more clearly what a good Base Camp should look like. As the porters poured into the camp, equipment was checked, tents were erected, air mattresses inflated and kit bags unpacked. Within about an hour of our arrival in the camp, the place looked like having been lived in for weeks. Soon the students were identifying various features like Koktang, Ratong and Kabru on the map and on the ground. Some arguments could be heard on the pros and cons of different approaches to the peaks that surrounded us.

Although the students were very keen to get to grips with the mountain straightway, we decided that the next day should be spent in the camp for rest and acclimatisation. We had been on the march for over a week without proper rest. So we stayed in the camp carrying out a detailed check of the oxygen apparatus, wireless sets and numerous other items like stoves, pressure cookers and aluminium ladders. To test the fuel in the gas stoves some members tried their hand at cooking. Lieut. Kohli of the Navy offered to cook a sweet dish and the sticky looking paste which he tried to pass off as a sweet was not really too bad.

That afternoon we held our first briefing conference. I gave out the detailed programme for the next ten days' training. Students had to work in different parties on the mountain and were required to organise the higher camps and ferry the loads themselves. Tenzing then talked at length about the problems they were likely to face. He said that the Kabru ice-fall was technically as difficult as the Khumbu ice-fall on Everest. He described the route giving the characteristics of different obstacles. There were numerous crevasses; some could be jumped across while others had to be bridged with logs of wood or aluminium ladders. At many places rock and ice-faces had to be encountered entailing interesting 'scrambles' and quite strenuous work. There were steep traverses on which fixed rope lines had to be laid. Tenzing advised the students to make the best of their training because their first major obstacle on Everest would be the ice-fall, which would tax both their energy and their patience. He finally explained to them that the route marked by him was not necessarily the best. It had been chosen to illustrate a number of points.

After the conference Tenzing spent two or three hours advising the syndicates on planning for the Everest expedition. That evening, when he came to my tent, he appeared to be satisfied with the enthusiasm and tenacity of the students and was optimistic about finding a good team for the Everest expedition.

With the exception of one or two days when the weather was bad, the next ten days were spent in hectic activity on the Kabru glacier. For many of the students it was their first experience of an ice-fall. In

the beginning they appeared to be somewhat awed by the dangers and hazards, but very soon, as they gained confidence, they moved up and down the ice-fall as if they had been living on it for months.

On the second day of the training, I accompanied some load-carrying parties from the Advance Base Camp to Camp I. We had gone half-way when we heard a dull, heavy noise from the upper reaches of the glacier. We looked up and saw a huge mass of ice and snow break off the Kabru shoulder and rush down the slope in an avalanche, which appeared to be moving steadily towards a party of climbers which was on its way from Camp I to Camp II. Instead of making any efforts to move out of the way, the climbers seemed to be standing still. We stood petrified watching the impending calamity. Barely ten seconds later, the climbers disappeared from view in a cloud of fine, powder snow. We were still wondering about the fate of our comrades when the white cloud thinned out. What a relief it was to see the figures of the climbers still standing in the same place. Next moment they were seen plodding up-hill again.

We resumed our climb and soon passed the site of the big avalanche. Tenzing had warned all students to be careful on this stretch. Having seen a huge avalanche only a little while earlier, we were extra careful when we passed the place.

Camp I was situated on a narrow rock ledge off the glacier at a height of over 17,000 feet. There was hardly a room for two tents and the climbers had to get in and out of the tents with great care. This Camp overlooked the Advance Base Camp and commanded an excellent view of the valley below.

That night, from our precarious perch on the rock face, we could see someone in the Advance Base Camp trying to send a message in Morse with the help of a torch. We could not interpret the signals, but it was clear that they were practising. We were able to pass over to them "OK" and "Good Night" by a torch. We could also see the very dim lights of Darjeeling well below the line of sight and more than thirty miles away as the crow flies.

The students enthusiastically practised their lessons in ice and

snow craft, scrambling on rocks, and rope work. There were two or three parties moving up and down the glaciers daily, gaining valuable experience. Most of these parties were accompanied by veteran Sherpas who gave demonstrations and corrected faults in techniques where necessary.

At Camp II, trials on the oxygen apparatus were carried out. Similarly our wireless sets were tested. It was interesting to find that sometimes moving the set only 10 yards or so on the mountain made all the difference to the performance.

A couple of days later I went to Camp II which had been sited at a height of over 19,000 feet just above the ice-fall. Kabru North looked quite approachable from the Camp, but we could not climb it because the mountain is sacred to the people of Sikkim. In fact our Camp was overlooked by two other sacred peaks, Kabru Dome and Kabru South.

We were nine climbers and Sherpas in this camp that night and had enough tents to house five or six more. Before turning in we saw the last rays of the sun on Kabru North and Kabru South. Within seconds of the sun going down, it was very cold and we went inside our tents. I was alone in a Meade tent. I could hear the noise of ice avalanches crashing down the mountain face with monotonous regularity.

I do not know when I dozed off but I was soon woken up by the sound of the loudest avalanche I had ever heard. It was obviously a huge ice avalanche. The tell-tale metallic and sharp clatter of pieces of ice was only too clear. The noise appeared to be coming nearer and nearer but by then we had got used to these noises. We knew that our camp was sited on a rise and most of the avalanches normally stopped in the basins on either side of the ridge. We knew we were safe.

But my complacency was soon shattered as an avalanche appeared to be approaching and with a premonition of impending danger I gripped my sleeping bag tight and held my breath. Almost simultaneously a strong gust of wind tore open the sleeve door near my feet and the next moment a gale seemed to blow right across my tent; it shook

me so violently that I felt that the tent had become airborne. The opening near my head began to flap violently. The wind seemed to suffocate me and I found myself shivering with cold even though I was fully protected by my sleeping bag. I tried to get up but my sleeping bag seemed very heavy. With the light of my torch I was horrified to see that everything inside the tent was covered by a thick layer of powder snow.

Soon the wind fell and stopped suddenly. I was not quite sure what had happened and what my next step should be. I could, however, hear climbers and Sherpas talking loudly in the other tents. I then realised that my tent was still on its original site. It soon became apparent that the wind had been caused by the blast preceding the avalanche. Had it not stopped short of our camp, the blast would have been followed by tons of ice and snow, sweeping everyone of us down with it.

I could hear somebody walking towards my tent. As he came near, he shouted to ask if I was all right. I recognised the voice of Da Namgyal, one of the Sherpa Instructors, and flashed my torch. As he entered the low tent on all fours, I could see that Da Namgyal was shocked to find me in that condition. He picked up a mess tin and with it started removing the snow from my sleeping bag. After scraping away all the snow from the tent, he collected it in a huge big heap near the door and then shovelled it out.

Da Namgyal told me that, although somewhat shaken, everyone was quite safe. The doors of their tents were not in the direction of the avalanche and, therefore, they had escaped the horror of what I had experienced. One of the unoccupied tents, however, was slightly damaged by the blast. He gave me some hot coffee from my thermos flask, wished me good night and returned to his tent.

It was to be expected that I would not sleep well that night. Strangely enough I got up next morning feeling quite fresh. Walking round the camp area, I saw that the avalanche had stopped barely twenty yards from my tent. Blocks of ice of various sizes with sharp jagged edges lay strewn all round. Indeed a narrow shave! A Sherpa



later explained to me that I owed my life to the fact that we had recognized the sanctity of holy Kabru.

That afternoon when I reached the Advance Base Camp, Tenzing came out to meet us. He had heard about the avalanche on our wireless link. For some reason he looked very upset. When I asked him if there was anything wrong, he said that he had just heard on the radio about the tragedy which had befallen the Women's Cho-Oyu expedition. Madame Claude Kogan, the leader, and a Belgian climber, Claudine Van der Stratten, were reported missing. Apparently they had been carried away by an avalanche.

Tenzing was greatly interested in the fortunes of that expedition. It was the first all-women's expedition to such a high mountain, and his two daughters, Pem Pem and Nima, and his niece Doma were members of the expedition. He had done a lot to assist Madame Kogan in organising it and had spent nearly a month in Kathmandu just before the expedition left. We talked about the tragedy and my

own harrowing experience of the night before was soon forgotten and we got on with our work.

Most of the climbers had had plenty of experience of the ice-fall although some of them did not acclimatise well on the mountain and could not reach Camp II. The last two days were kept for practice of actual techniques lower down on the glacier. Here, under the direct supervision of Tenzing and the Sherpa Instructors, the students bridged crevasses, lashed logs of wood, cut steps and fixed rope lines on steep ice traverses and generally covered all the finer points.

We had practically finished our technical training on the ice-fall when we left the Advance Base Camp on October 29. However, we continued our training on the glacier on our return journey. The students halted for a day at the Base Camp where the two doctors on the Course carried out certain physiological observations. In order to compile a report on the equipment, comments on all the indigenously produced trial equipment were collated. The next day we started on the trek back to Darjeeling.

Tenzing and the Sherpa Instructors accompanied us to Yoksam where the next Basic Course students were to join us for field training.

On arrival at Darjeeling, the students were given two days to prepare their syndicate plans after which each plan was considered at group discussions attended by all the students. For five days, we thrashed out every aspect of administration, including the movement and actual ascent plans of the expedition. At the end of this, we finalised the list of equipment and prepared specific instructions for their procurement.

The Pre-Everest-cum-Advanced Course concluded on the 15th November. That night there was a farewell dinner for the students and we were very happy. Pem Pem, Nima and Doma who had returned safely from the Cho-Oyu expedition that afternoon were able to join the function. Although the expedition had ended in disaster, the three girls had done well on the mountain. Nima was especially congratulated by everyone for establishing a world record for a teenage girl by climbing to a height of 22,440 feet.

All wish to know but few the price will pay

— JUVENAL

4

The Team

Mr. Sarin had specially come from Delhi to finalise the selection of the Everest expedition team. He presided over the passing-out ceremony on November 16 and pinned the embroidered badges of the Institute on the pullovers of the successful trainees.

Throughout the Course the students had worked very hard. Although I discourage competition, in this sport, I must confess that I was not unhappy to observe a spirit of healthy competition amongst them. Everyone of them wanted to do well enough to be selected for the expedition and now, with the Course having finished, there was an air of suspense. The team had yet to be announced.

The selection of the team was made after a discussion between Mr. Sarin, on behalf of the Sponsoring Committee, and myself. He made it clear that while each case might be discussed at length, where there was a difference of opinion, the view of the Leader would prevail. Some cases presented difficulty, and there were long discussions about them. We had finally to make a choice and select some and turn down the others. Decisions in each case were made with complete unanimity.

We discussed the selections the night before the graduation ceremony of the Pre-Everest-cum-Advanced Course and became so absorbed in it that it was 1 a.m. before we realised that it was time to go to bed.

After the passing-out ceremony the trainees assembled in the Principal's office, where Mr. Sarin announced the team amidst pin-drop silence. The suspense was at last over and we could see the evidence of excitement on many faces. There were handshakes, con-

gratulations, back-slapping and, of course, expressions of sympathy for those who had not been selected.

In addition to the twelve climbing members, including the Leader, the names of a photographer and one doctor were announced. Those selected were: Brigadier (then Colonel) Gyan Singh (Leader), Keki F. Bunshah (Deputy Leader), Flt. Lt. A.K. Chowdhury, Capt. S.K. Das, Nawang Gombu, C.V. Gopal, Sonam Gyatso, Inst. Lt. M.S. Kohli, Capt. Narinder Kumar, B.D. Misra, Da Namgyal, Rajendra Vikram Singh, Ang Temba and C.P. Vohra.

We still had to find another doctor, a meteorologist and a signals officer. The Government Departments concerned were very co-operative and volunteers to accompany the expedition were nominated without much difficulty.

It was later discovered that, though most of the other equipment would be ready to accompany the expedition, the oxygen bottles would only be ready about three weeks later; and Flt. Lt. A.J.S. Grewal, who had attended the Pre-Everest Course, was selected to follow with the equipment.

Capt. A.B. Jungalwala of the Gorkha Rifles had done well on the Pre-Everest Course, but was not considered for the Everest team because he was earmarked for another expedition, which he was unable to join because of some misunderstanding. With the concurrence of the Sponsoring Committee, he was selected to accompany us as an additional climbing member. His fluency in Nepali got him the assignment of Transport Officer during the approach march.

In all 19 climbing and non-climbing members were selected. Later, two other men of the Indian Army Signals Corps and a Liaison Officer from the Government of Nepal were included. Finally, Sohan Singh, who had been working as Secretary to the Sponsoring Committee and was very keen to go to the mountains, was included in the team with the approval of the Sponsoring Committee, bringing the total number of members of the expedition to 23. Those who were chosen after the announcement of the team on November 16 were: Flt. Lt. N.S. Bhagwanani, Flt. Lt. A.J.S. Grewal, Capt. A.B. Jungalwala, Lt.

S.C. Nanda, S.U. Shankar Rao, Sohan Singh, Naik Balakrishnan, Signalman Om Prakash Vaid, and Dhanbir Rai, Liaison Officer of the Nepal Government.



उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानम्।

To raise oneself one should depend on one's own strength.

— BHAGAVADGITA

5

Planning for the Equipment

Now that the suspense was over and the final selection had been made, we found that, though disappointed, even those who were not lucky to have been selected for the team accepted the decision sportingly and offered their assistance to the expedition in any other capacity.

Next day we placed final orders for our air mattresses with the Bengal Waterproof Works. The firm has for years manufactured heavy air mattresses but their first prototypes made to our specifications were as good as any imported air mattress of the same type. The firm not only promised to donate all our requirement of air mattresses, but also offered to manufacture rubberised tarpaulins to be used as floor coverings for our tents which were to be manufactured by one of the ordnance factories in Kanpur.

During my European tour, the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research in Zurich and the French Mountaineering Federation had offered all help we needed for our expedition. We took advantage of the promise whenever we were in difficulty. However, when I wrote to them later that we had planned to make our own equipment in India for the expedition, they were naturally a little sceptical. A sympathetic friend from Zurich who had been associated with organising similar expeditions for many years wrote as follows:—

“...I have been going through the papers you left here concerning the Indian Everest expedition and the list of equipment you propose manufacturing in India, and the more I read the more my hair stands on end...

...We only know that even if the whole expedition were equipped with European material, orders would have to be placed latest by the end of October, and this with manufacturers who have everything ready and working smoothly; stocks, suppliers, staff, machines and experience of years. We do not quite see how it will be possible in India even with the best will and the highest skill, to catch up with all this in such a short time. If you can do it, however, and perform the miracle, we shall be the first to truly value and admire the unique achievement..."

We had accepted the challenge. The miracle had to be performed before February 1960.

Kohli's trial report on climbing boots and other equipment promptly reached the ordnance factories, but some components like zips and materials came late. This meant that the factories had to work overtime, which they did without hesitation. They even departed from the government procedures in some cases, and I hope that the audit authorities do not read this portion of the book.

Bombay was a centre of intense activity. On account of his heavy professional work, Keki was burning midnight oil to attend to the import of oxygen, some special high-altitude tents, eider-down feather and special fabrics. In many cases, to save time, the material or the equipment had to be flown out.

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research in Zurich co-ordinated most of the work of obtaining material in Europe. When we ran short of foreign exchange for oxygen, owing to increase in prices, this organisation sent us a gift of oxygen bottles valued at approximately three thousand rupees.

The French Mountaineering Federation in Paris was equally helpful and negotiated with numerous firms on our behalf and obtained special concessions for us.

For weeks there was a constant stream of telegrams, letters and trunk calls regarding the hundred and one problems that cropped up as time went on.

During one of my trips round the country, I was in Delhi. I was woken up at about one in the morning by my sister-in-law who told me that there was an urgent telephone call from Kumar. When I went to the telephone, Kumar said that he had received a trunk call from Keki in Bombay. Certain snags had cropped up with regard to the delivery of a specialised fabric. Keki wanted the Leader's decisions about changing the specifications. During a long telephone conversation, a number of alternatives were discussed and decisions taken. When I told my sister-in-law with whom I was staying that the telephone call was about some vital equipment she admonished me for not waking her up and associating her with the problem. "Look at all the worrying hours I have lost," she said.

Back in Bombay, with the kindness of the Naval authorities, Kohli had been permitted to establish a well organised office in the Naval Barracks. Besides being responsible for the local purchase of stores, Kohli had to maintain statistical data and charts showing the procurement of equipment and stores as well as the position with regard to the budget. He had to send periodical reports to the Sponsoring Committee in Delhi and the Leader's headquarters in Darjeeling. Jungalwala later joined Kohli and his help was invaluable in contacting numerous firms and shops for indigenous equipment.

The task of collecting medical supplies and surgical instruments was assigned to our physiologist and doctor, Das. The Director General of Armed Forces Medical Services and medical authorities of other Services in Delhi gave all help by way of advice. They also loaned equipment which could not be obtained in India.

While most of the members drove themselves hard to keep the time schedules laid down. Mr. Sarin in Delhi had also to share a considerable part of the burden. I had seen him work under great pressure in his day to day routine. Even so he was never too busy to attend to the numerous problems of the Expedition that were put up to him. He gave every member his unstinted support to overcome any obstacle that came our way.

While I was beginning to feel the pressure of work myself, I knew

that some of the other members were perhaps subjected to heavier strain. I was, therefore, anxious about their health. We did not wish to strain ourselves during the period of preparation so much that we were completely fagged out when we went to the mountains.

I, therefore, addressed a personal letter to all the members to pay particular attention to their health. This is what I wrote :

INDIAN MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION

Camp : Bombay
January 19, 1960

My dear,

The doctor's appreciation of the medical cover is attached for your information. Amongst other technical details given by the doctor, may I ask you to do the following?

- (a) Have yourself checked up medically, preferably by a specialist where possible. Particular stress should be laid on fitness with regard to throat, bronchial and respiratory troubles, teeth, ears, sinus, stools and any other pet ailments that you may have.
- (b) If you are fond of your bottle, please put it away for the time being. I have stopped drinking myself.
- (c) If you are a smoker, perhaps it would be unkind to ask you to stop it completely, but I would advise you to reduce it by resorting to chewing gum or some other device. Will power is perhaps the best answer.
- (d) Keep yourself fit by regular exercise. If you have the time, I would strongly recommend that you take long walks, preferably carrying a rucksack with at least 30 to 50 lbs. in it. I started my New Year with a resolution to take daily exercise of this nature, and have, for the last fortnight, been walking 2 hours a day with 56 lbs. in my rucksack; I feel fitter than ever before.
- (e) The doctor tells me that deep breathing exercise is very good, particularly nasal breathing. Please practise it. May I also suggest that while walking you practise co-ordination of brea-

thing with your pace? You will find this very helpful during the climb.

You should be protected against typhoid, smallpox, cholera and tetanus. We shall arrange for anti-tetanus and cholera injections when we assemble on February 20. But if you have not had T.A.B. within the last one year and vaccination within the last two years, please have these done now. Please send the dates of your last T.A.B. and cholera inoculations and vaccination to Capt. S.K. Das, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling, together with your medical report.

Yours sincerely,
GYAN SINGH

Rajendra Vikram Singh, being the scientist member of the expedition, was assigned the task of checking the scientific equipment like oxygen apparatus and transistor radio sets. He had also to go to Kathmandu in early February to make arrangements for the enrolment of high-altitude Sherpas. There was some difficulty regarding Darjeeling Sherpas because, according to the rules of the Government of Nepal as well as the Himalayan Society of Nepal, only Sherpas residing in Nepal could be employed on expeditions in Nepal. However, with the co-operation of the officials of the Government of Nepal and the Himalayan Society, the problem was resolved amicably.

Towards the beginning of February, the tempo of work in all the centres had gone up considerably. The target date, February 20, 1960, for collection of men and material at Delhi, was fast approaching. The Sponsoring Committee had to worry about finding suitable storage space for the hundreds of packages that would start pouring in from the second week of February onwards, and also housing the members. Mr. Sarin fixed this up with Gp. Capt. S.W. Bobb, the Air Force Station Commander in Delhi. Gp. Capt. Bobb made available five or six rooms for the stores and enough accommodation for the members at the Central Vista Mess.

All members, except the geologist and Rajendra Vikram, who was in Kathmandu, arrived in Delhi by the scheduled date, i.e. February

20, 1960. Some members had to come much earlier because the finished equipment and other stores had already started coming in. By February 15, there was a stream of packages, parcels, stores, rations and foreign goods arriving at the Central Vista Mess, and soon all the rooms allotted for storage and the spacious verandahs of the building were littered with the packages, which had to be opened for a check-up and re-packed. At this stage our packing office presented a spectacle of a confused mass of clothing, equipment, cooking utensils, rations, ropes, tents, rucksacks, oxygen equipment and packing cases.

A complete packing plan had been made for different items of stores and equipment required at various stages of the expedition. Groups of serial numbers had been given separately for equipment, rations, oxygen apparatus, medical stores etc. Also, different colours were allotted for different stages like approach march, acclimatisation period, Base Camp and higher camps on the mountians. The members were divided into different groups, each group knowing exactly what it had to do with regard to the stores or equipment for which it had been made responsible.

Das and Bhagwanani, the two doctors, got all the medical stores and medicines together. More than three hundred packages of composite rations had to be packed, in addition to the bulk rations for our three months' stay in Nepal. We knew that we could not depend on local purchase very much once we got into the interior of Nepal. Kohli, helped by Jungalwala, Chowdhury, Sonam Gyatso and Ang Temba, was assigned the duties of a Quartermaster. By the time the packing machinery was put into operation the packages not only occupied the whole of the space allotted to us, but also had overflowed into many verandahs of the Mess.

Rajendra Vikram and Grewal checked and packed part of the oxygen equipment which had arrived. Grewal was sent to Calcutta to get 8 oxygen bottles (5 Swiss and 3 French), which were used during the Pre-Everest training, refilled by Indian Oxygen Ltd. There he was told that since the mountaineering oxygen bottles were not normally filled by them a special permission of the Chief Inspec-

tor of Explosives in India was necessary. He finally obtained permission over the telephone and the Indian Oxygen Ltd. undertook the work that very day. At the time of inspection of the oxygen which was already inside the bottle, it was found that there was moisture in some of the bottles. It was a serious matter because the presence of moisture at low temperatures would have caused freezing inside the bottles. Grewal immediately sent a cable to the Swiss Foundation requesting them to ensure and confirm that the fresh consignment of oxygen bottles under despatch was moisture-free and contained high-altitude oxygen.

The next day Grewal reported to me in Delhi, and within a few hours he was made to fly back to Calcutta with two new bottles out of the partly received oxygen consignment. On inspection, it was found that they were free of moisture and I heaved a sigh of relief. Subsequently, it was confirmed that the bottles supplied for the Pre-Everest training were filled with hospital oxygen due to the shortage of time, and that the fresh supply had been thoroughly checked to be moisture-free. Grewal was then sent to Bombay to make arrangements to collect, inspect, and bring the bulk of the oxygen bottles and other foreign consignments which were due to arrive about the middle of March.

Meteorological equipment, signals equipment and office equipment including stationery and postage stamps for the members and Sherpas had to be checked and packed by Rao, Nanda and Sohan Singh. Gopal had to make sure that all the necessary photographic equipment, both for movie and still photography in black and white and colour, was got ready.

On the morning of February 27, nearly 600 packages were laid out on the lawns outside the Mess for a final check. In the afternoon the packages were loaded on four large trucks to transport them by road to Lucknow. The same evening the small convoy moved to Lucknow under Nanda.

At about three in the afternoon when most of the members had already gone home, my brother and his wife dropped in at the Central

Vista Mess. My sister-in-law handed over a telegram to me. After reading the telegram, I asked them to sit down for a few minutes and went out to see if I could find any of the members. I saw Jungalwala and Chowdhury some distance away making plans for the evening. As we all walked into the office again, I told Jungalwala to arrange for a truck and Chowdhury to bring a taxi. My sister-in-law was looking anxiously at us. I could see that she was worried; so I asked her to have a cup of tea, but she sensed that something was wrong. I read out the telegram to her. It was sent by Nanda from Sikandrabad and read:

“One truck overturned twenty miles from Delhi. Require (a) one truck (b) one member and some labour. Leaving Jagdish with vehicle. Self proceeding Lucknow. Most boxes broken.”

We wondered if this was the truck which contained delicate equipment like wireless batteries and oxygen apparatus. I could not hang back further so we left my brother and his wife and within an hour were at the scene of the accident.

We found the truck lying upside down by the road side with its four wheels in the air. Young Jagdish, an ex-student of the Mountaineering Institute, who was helping us in our preparation, was standing guard like a sentry with an ice-axe in hand. The driver of the truck and his companion were fast asleep under a tree. We were relieved to find that the truck contained only food packages which were buried under it, and quite a number of them were smashed while most of them were badly damaged. Tins of food, rice and various other provisions lay scattered around the vehicle. We tried to remove the packages but found that they were badly pinned down, and had to spend nearly five hours to patch up the damaged packages and reload them in the truck we had brought with us.

The following day some superstitious friends expressed concern at what they called the bad omen. But my mother laughed it off and recalled that, on the day I left to join my unit for the first time in September 1936, the tonga carrying my luggage had also overturned. “This small mishap did not stop my son from rising from a sepoy to a Brigadier”. She smiled and blessed me saying that all would be well.

The next two days in Delhi, we spent in the Government of India offices bidding farewell to many of our well-wishers. We met the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, the Minister for Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, the Minister for Education, the Chief of the Army Staff and the members of the Sponsoring Committee. They all wished us godspeed.

The expedition members left for Jaynagar by train on the evening of March 2. I had to go to Darjeeling to collect a few items of equipment from the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. After a touching farewell from the staff and my family, Tenzing and I left Darjeeling on March 4, to join the rest of the team.

When we arrived at Jaynagar the place was bustling with activity. A gathering of nearly 700 Sherpas and porters, and nearly twice as many spectators, presented a scene similar to that of an Indian fair. I was glad to find that all the baggage and the high-altitude Sherpas and porters had arrived on schedule.

There was a lot to do for everyone. The porters had to be registered and paid advances, loads had to be allotted to the porters and mountaineering kits had to be distributed to the Sherpas.

Sonam Gyatso had arrived with more than one hundred thousand rupees in Nepalese currency. Thanks to our Embassy in Nepal, he had not only got the money exchanged in Kathmandu quickly, but also was provided with an armed escort to Jaynagar.

At last the drudgery of planning, months of hard work, moments of anxiety and working against time were behind us. The following day, we were to start on our trek and we looked forward to one another's company for the next few months.

As I lay on my air mattress in the verandah of the Rest House, that night I thought of all the people who had helped to make the expedition possible. Ministers, government officials, businessmen, industrialists, Service officers and even clerks, typists and peons—considered it a matter of pride to do their bit for the expedition.

All the roads of our neighbourhood were cheerful and friendly, having each of them pleasant qualities of their own; but this one seemed different from the others in its masterful suggestion of a serious purpose, speeding you along with a strange uplifting of the heart.

— KENNETH GRAHAME

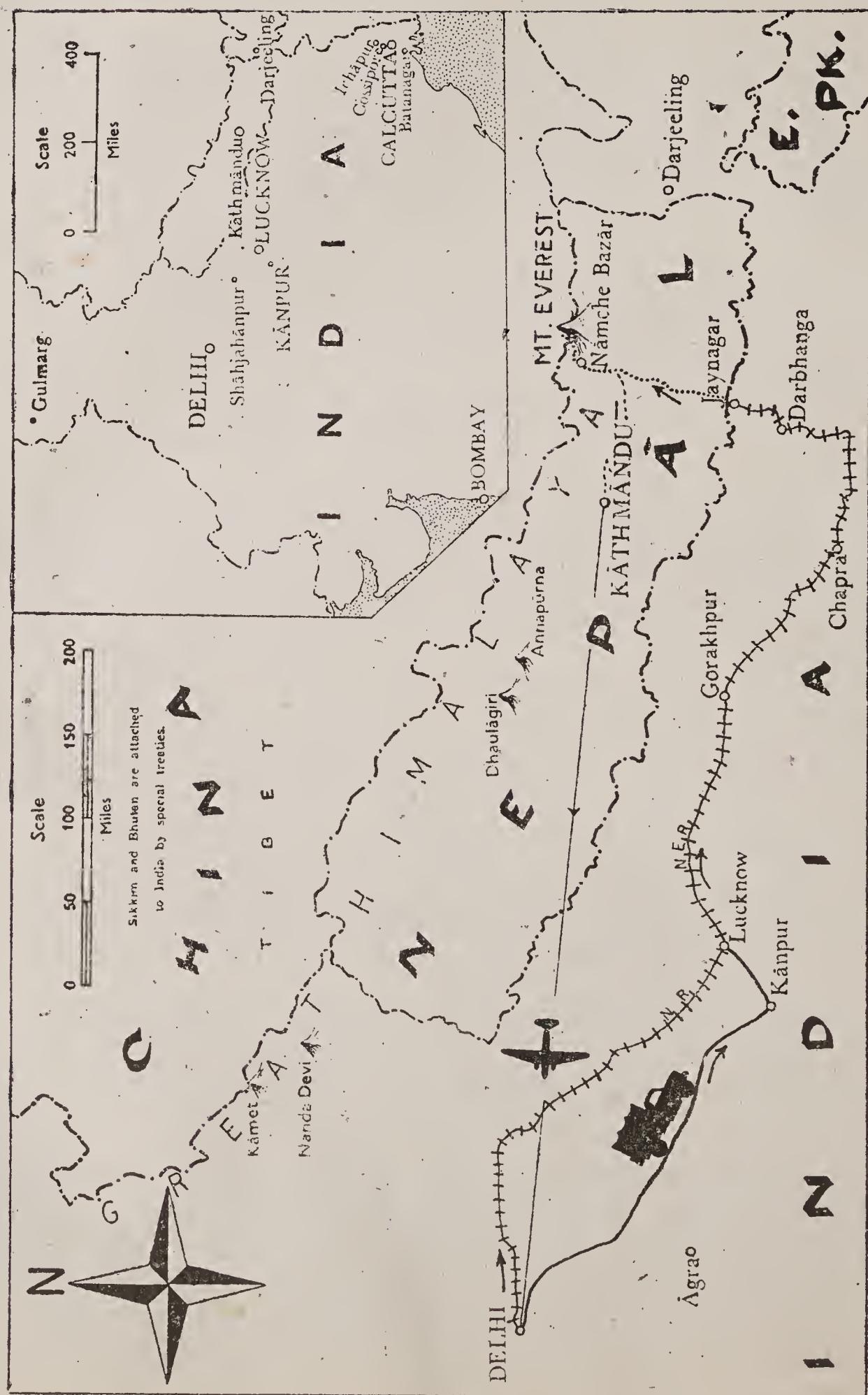
6

The March Begins

As we marched off, we were told by a local government official that half of Jaynagar was waiting for us at the border to give us a send-off, and when we came to an embankment on the border of India and Nepal, we saw a gaily decorated arch with the Hindi words. "Ap ko safalta ho", meaning "May you achieve success". From a distance we could hear trumpets, conches, *shahnais*, and the beating of drums. Once again we were all profusely garlanded and the *tilak*—a sacred mark, was applied on our foreheads, accompanied by the chanting of holy *mantras* by a priest.

A little girl did *Arati* with an earthen lamp placed on a tray which had a map of India and Nepal, showing Everest and our route done in varicoloured vermillion powder..

Meanwhile Rajendra Vikram was busy recording his running commentary and the sound effects of the ceremony on a portable tape-recorder. He would occasionally come to one of us and ask how we felt. There would be some incoherent words because we were so worked up with emotion. At last it was all over and we thanked the people of Jaynagar for their warm send-off, and stepped into Nepal. Press photographers sprinted forward into Nepal for their last snapshots from vantage points. The porters, including about fifty Sherpa women in their colourful dress, high-altitude Sherpas and the members of the first party poured into Nepal through the narrow defile of the archway and fanned out.



The route from Delhi to Namche Bazar and back

A final goodbye to the Press photographers and we were off in a stiff breeze, through low, flat country, away to the north towards Everest. Sonam Gyatso was marching by my side, and as I looked at him, I found him lost in thought and muttering some prayer.

For quite some distance we walked along the bank of the river *Kamla*. And then we cut across the fields growing wheat, gram and millets, waded a number of streams and passed through many villages. After about six hours' march we reached our camp site near the village of Chhatri situated in a low-lying open area on the north bank of the river.

During our planning we had decided that on the approach march we must eat well. Appetites were good and we meant to build up a reserve of energy and vitality. We knew that when we reached the higher altitude it would be a matter of forcing oneself to eat.

Our route next day lay through wooded country on undulating hills. It was hot and sultry and heavy going as we moved through the sandy patches in the jungle. When we reached the *Tawa Khola*, a fast flowing river with a stony bed, running across our track, Kohli, who had a touch of diarrhoea that day, was carried across by Kumar on his back. As the water was nearly thigh-deep in some places it was a difficult and risky business, but the 'bull', as Kumar was called, was known to be tough.

A number of members who had crossed the river earlier got their cameras ready in anticipation of a fall which appeared to be certain. Kumar did play up to the expectant photographers a couple of times and pretended to lose his balance. Poor Kohli, however, white-faced, clung to the 'bull's' neck for his dear life.

On arrival at the camp, we found that the signals detachment had opened up the wireless set and by 3 p.m. had established communication with Kathmandu. We transmitted our up-to-date report.

That afternoon in the camp, Kumar decided to perform the cowboy act. He persuaded a villager to let him ride his pony and commenced to show off his equestrian skill. But much to his disgust and

everybody else's amusement, he found that the horse did not co-operate. His body swayed with uplifted arms like a bird about to take off, and the horse's reluctance to respond was quite a treat to watch and attracted much attention. A mixture of trot, canter and gallop was displayed with violent body movements, irregular bumps and a wild swinging of the legs, with the eventual slipping out of the stirrups. We now knew how not to ride a pony.

We were anxious to reach the hilly areas. The first three or four days had been very hot. After crossing nearly two miles of open country interspersed with patches overgrown with tall elephant grass, we reached the hills on the fifth day. We climbed a couple of thousand feet and camped on a low spur of hill with a river winding almost right round it.

The second party was not expected for a few hours, so I strolled away from the camp for some time. After walking around alone for a couple of hours, I sat on a stone which was carved by the flowing water in the shape of a chair. I thought it was a nice place to sit alone and relax for some time. I sat there, lost in thought for a long time. What is very satisfying about mountaineering is the time one gets to think and contemplate. One can afford to indulge in reflection, away from the hustle and bustle of modern life, telephone calls, visitors, conferences and meetings, correspondence and files and hundreds of other things. Living conditions may not be good by civilised standards, but then one has to look at a porter woman carrying a sixty pound load and perhaps her small baby. She does not possess an air mattress or a sleeping bag either.

I looked at my watch. It was almost 11 o'clock. I had been sitting there for nearly two hours. It was time for me to go back. As I reached the camp, I could see the forward elements of the second party arriving. We were soon joined by Jungalwala, Gombu, Bhagwanani, and our meteorologist, Rao, in a Hawaian shirt. The party had decided to camp a mile and a half further up.

I noticed that instead of a mixed group, the second party porters were almost entirely Sherpas and Sherpanis from the Solu and Khumbu districts in Western Nepal. In the camp they had settled

down in small groups and had started brewing their tea and cooking their meals. As I went round making my acquaintance with them, I found they were cheerful and friendly. Some Sherpas showed their Himalayan Club record books, others displayed photographs given by members of previous expeditions. The Sherpanis in their multi-coloured clothes and Tibetan boots and the Sherpa porters wearing jade earrings and long hair, made a very colourful gathering.

It was a pleasure to meet these unspoilt, unsophisticated, simple and sturdy people who laughed at the slightest pretext. They stood in strange contrast to their brethren who had spent some time in the cities, and had tasted modern ways of life.

As the bulk of the climbing members were in the leading party, I had to join them again. So, the next day Rajendra Vikram and I left the second party behind and stepped out to catch up with the leading group at its next camp.



So far we had walked in comparatively flat country. After Chisapani we had entered the hilly region but kept to the low-lying foothills and river beds. Even our last camp was barely 2,500 feet above sea level. The people, their language, their build and their faces were more akin to the Biharis than the Mongoloid features of the Nepalese. But now we were beginning to notice the difference.

When we reached the river *Sun Kosi*, we looked for the boats but could not see any. On hearing us shout, three men rushed out of a hut on the other side of the river and jumped on to what looked like a big log of wood. As they rowed across with crude paddles, we noticed that the boat was no more than a trunk of a big tree about twenty feet long and four feet in diameter. It had been hollowed out to accommodate the passengers and loads.

When we reached the highest point of the ridge along which we were travelling, we saw rhododendrons in bloom for the first time. There was a small forest of rhododendrons covering the slopes on either side of the ridge. The deep red flowers looked like the rubies studded in beautiful Indian jewellery.

At tea-time we asked Vohra, our geologist, how an absolutely flat piece of land, nearly 250 yards long and about 100 yards wide, could appear in a mountainous region. It did not seem possible that the work had been done by manual labour. We had also seen a few other such flat plots at about the same height as this place, but they were not near any village. He thought it must have been the bed of a river. Through some subterranean upheaval, the whole area must have been raised and the ridges had assumed their present shape through centuries of erosion.

Our advance party entered Okhaldunga before midday on March 13, but the bulk of the party arrived later. In one or two shops we could hear a radio playing on full blast. Many houses and shops had geranium pots and other bright coloured flowers decorating the windows. Generally the whole town looked clean and tidy. *Chhang* (rice beer) shops on the way proved irresistible to many of our porters, who did not clock in till after four in the afternoon.

As we entered the town we noticed that practically every man's and woman's face was dyed red, and there were patches of red powder

strewn all along the stone-paved streets, bearing testimony to the festivities earlier that morning. Everyone looked very gay and happy. It was the second day of *Holi*, the Hindu festival of colour. The Hindu influence was predominant in the town where there were numerous idols of Shiva and Vishnu. Lines from the Hindu scriptures were written on most of the doors of shops and houses. During our march we had met Rais and Limboos as well as Tamangs. Most of the people in these parts follow the Hindu religion, but the Tamangs were Buddhists. After Okhaldunga, Buddhist influence appeared to be on the increase and we came across more and more Buddhist stone structures called *chortens*, *Mani* walls and prayers carved on stone, as well as prayer flags fluttering on tall bamboo poles. Reciting *Om Mane Padme Hum*, all Buddhist members of our caravan passed the *Mani* walls leaving them on their right.

The following day, we left for Thare at seven in the morning. After a steady climb for about three hours, we descended about seven hundred feet. It was a windy day and as we climbed higher we found the wind blowing harder and the clouds drifting past us. Quite often visibility was reduced to a few yards.

Within an hour of our next day's march, we came upon a panorama of countless snow-covered peaks. It was a bright and clear day, and the view was truly breathtaking. Every member was hypnotised by the spectacle, and instinctively reached for his camera. There was more film exposed during an hour or so that morning than during the entire previous week.



मरुतः शिवा नवतृणा जगतो विमलं नमो रजसि वृष्टिरपाम्।

Pleasant breeze, green grass-covered earth, clear sky and a slight drizzle on the dust.

— BHARAVI

7

In Sherpa Land

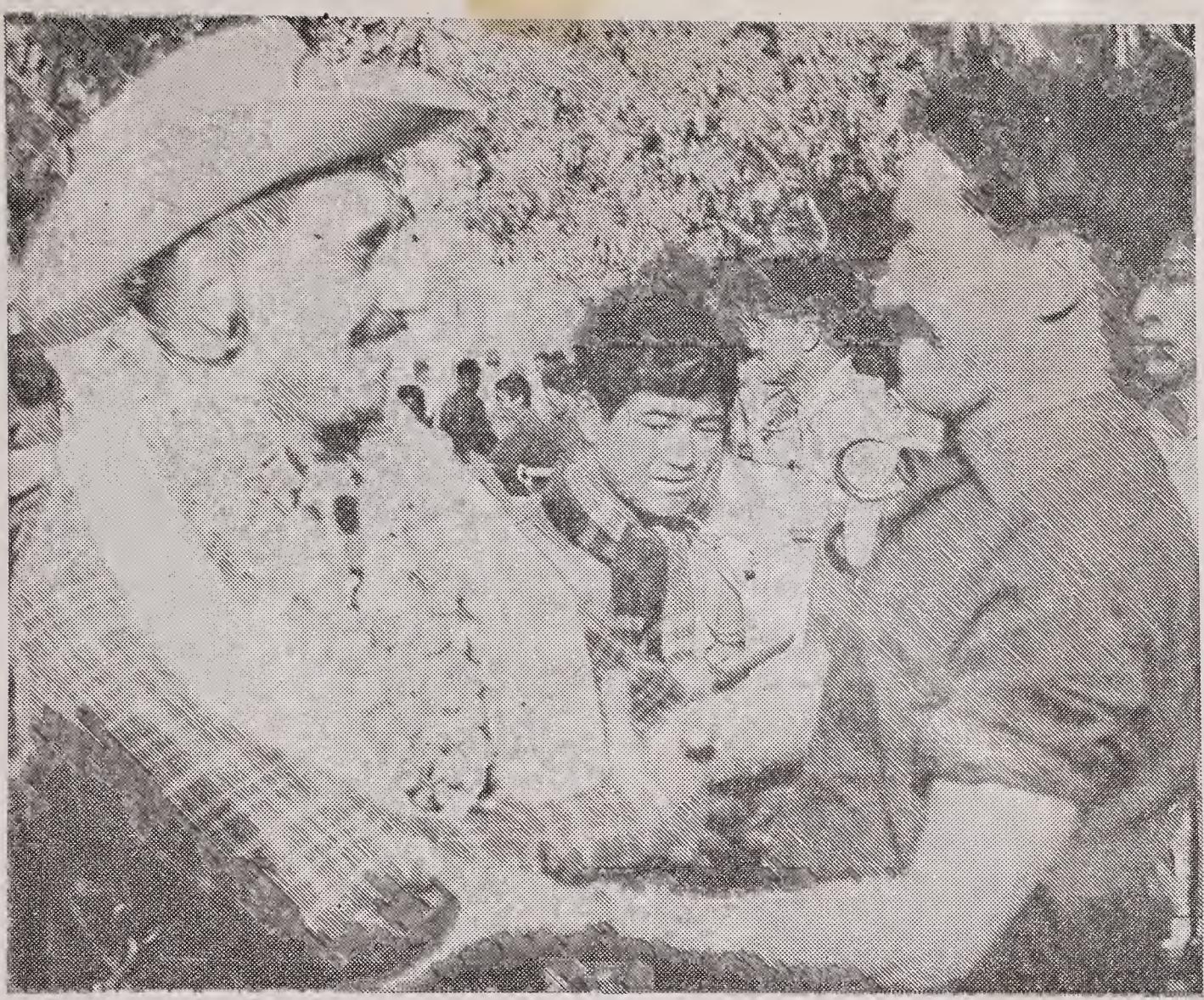
We crossed a river and entered the famous Solu Valley, the land of the Sherpas.

I recalled Tenzing's daughter Pem Pem's words, "Uncle, wait till you see our Solu Khumbu. You will forget Switzerland." We had not seen Khumbu district yet, but Pem Pem certainly had reasons to be proud of her country.

The beautiful green 'alps', neat houses, well maintained fences, the walled-in fields, cherry blossoms and flowering bushes, and vegetation in all shades of green, from pale yellowish to dark brown, made the valley look like a land out of this world. It gave an impression of beauty as well as plenty. Simple people who lived in this serene area went about their daily labours unhurried. Men, women and children stopped to look at us in curiosity, but were not camera-shy when we wanted to take their pictures. Luckily tourists had not yet spoilt this beautiful land. The lack of communications was perhaps a blessing in disguise.

We camped on a beautiful alp. On the slope all round there were scattered Sherpa houses which were neat in construction and generally white-washed on the outside. The ground floor was used for housing the cattle, the first floor was the living room, while the top floor was used as an attic.

As usual, our porters dumped their loads and ran into various houses. Generally they lived in small groups and billeted themselves in the homes of the villagers. These paying guests had to buy the



"Tiger" Tenzing saying goodbye to the Leader of Expedition

The Leader of the Expedition with Tenzing





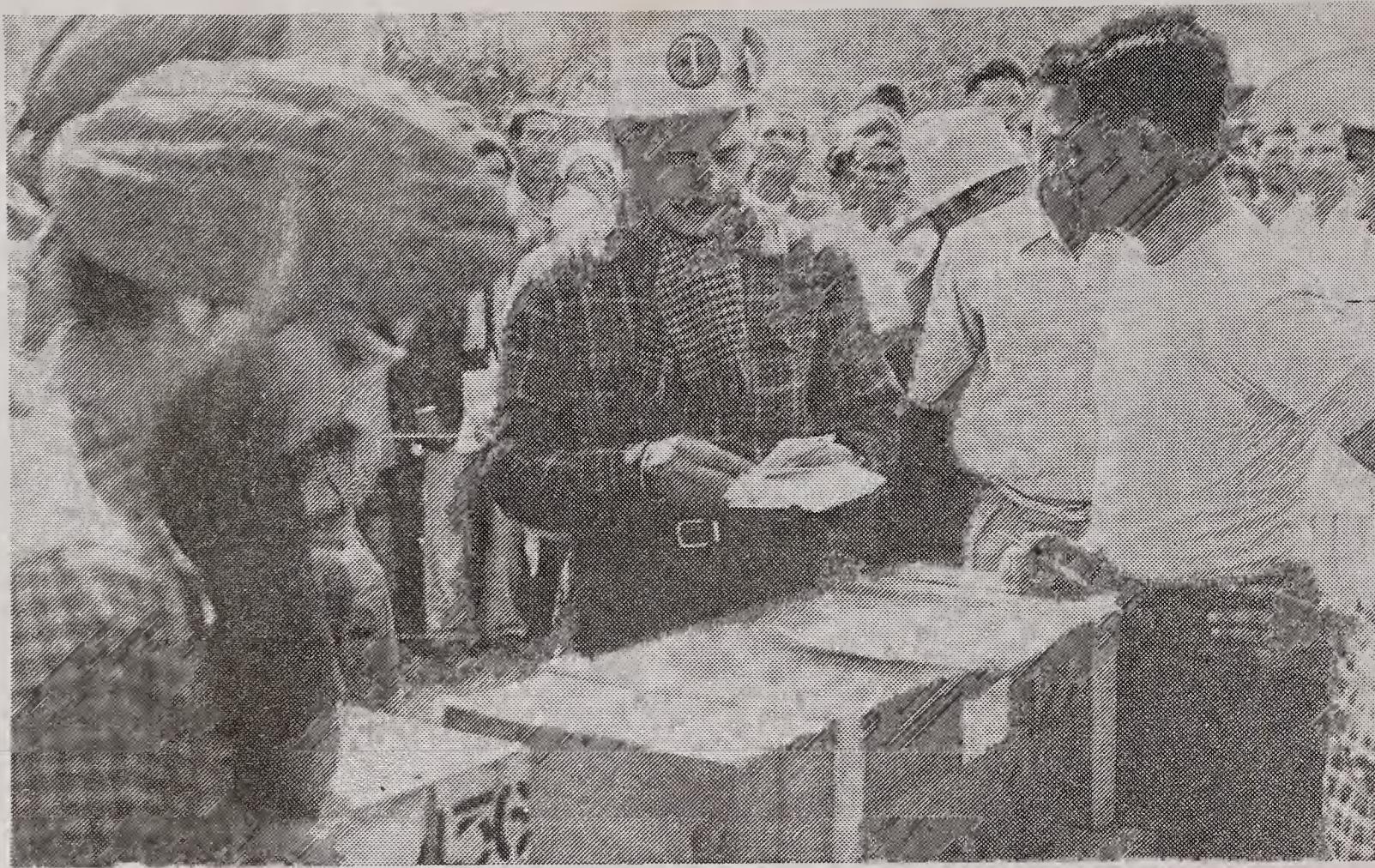
The Leader on a camel



Wading across the Kamla River



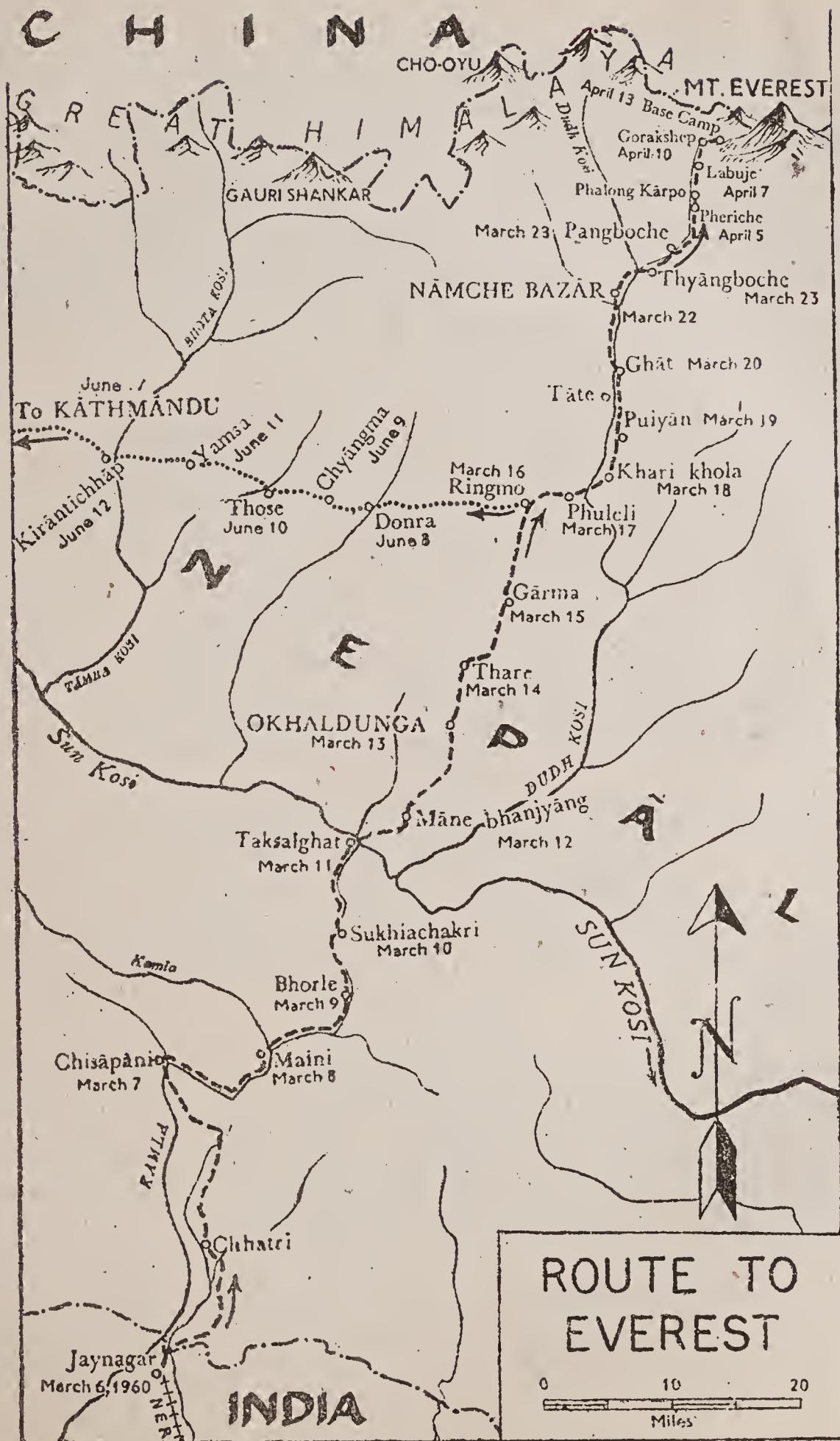
A smiling Sherpa porter



Checking the stores and equipment

Loads being allotted to porters at Jaynagar





minimum stipulated quantity of *chhang*, or *rakshi* costing not less than one *sukka*, which was a quarter of a Nepali rupee. The guests did not have to pay for their sleeping accommodation or the privilege of cooking on the premises. Each group of porters spent from five to ten rupees per day, and shared drinks and accommodation.

The next day the porters appeared to be in a great hurry to move on; they were round our tents almost at dawn and were itching to pick up their loads and go. They wanted to reach the next village, which was a big market place.

Exactly at six the Sardar blew his whistle which was a signal for the porters to collect their loads. The whistle seemed to have triggered an avalanche. The porters swarmed noisily round the heap of baggage, the small mass of humanity converging on to one central point, elbowing, pushing, jostling each other, like bees on a hive. Soon the porters who had got their loads first were seen running away. Within minutes they were all off, hurrying away in the direction of the village, where they hoped to get the best bargains by being the first to arrive. To avoid such stampedes, we decided to scatter the loads in future.

On the morning of March 16, the mail runner who had come from Kathmandu left our camp with mail and many still and cine films exposed by the members. The films were provided by the expedition and those using the cameras had to caption each exposure. The films were then collected and packed and sent to the Sponsoring Committee in Delhi.

Rajendra Vikram had to send the tape recordings also with the mail runner. The Sponsoring Committee had arranged with All India Radio to play back the recordings in the weekly Newsreel programme. Some tapes had already been sent from Jaynagar and we were looking forward to hearing the recordings.

After half an hour's walk, we reached the village of Darpu which was crowded to the point of overflowing with the influx of more than 300 men and women porters of our expedition. All the porters had arrived in the market town before us and the Sherpas and Sherpanis had crowded into the shops. It was impossible to see what was inside.

I elbowed my way into one of the shops. The shopkeeper, a handsome young man, was selling fur caps, cheap colourful clothes, shawls, Tibetan aprons, broad leather belts with attached wallets, combs, rosaries and numerous other trinkets. Practically every customer was shouting to attract the attention of the shopkeeper. Some Sherpanis were whispering to each other that things were cheaper in Darjeeling.

The shops were no more than small wooden stalls. In addition to the wooden stalls which were occupied by the shopkeepers only on market days, there were a number of big permanent provision shops. In a corner of the road there were villagers who were selling potatoes and rice which they had brought from the surrounding villages.



We had spent more than two hours in this great shopping centre of the area. The Sherpas were reluctant to leave as they wanted to buy gifts for their relations in Namche Bazar and other villages in the Khumbu district where there was no market.

A couple of our members went off to visit a nearby village called Saleri, which boasts of a High School with a staff of three teachers and 45 children. English, Nepali and Hindi are taught in the school, and each student has to pay four rupees per month as fees. The school is run by a Panchayat (village committee).

The previous evening, Das had sent a note from our second party which was a day behind us. We were glad to hear that he was able to save the life of a man by performing a minor operation in the field. There was a quarrel and this man was hit by a young porter on the head with a stone and might have bled to death. The patient had to be carried on a stretcher, and the porter who had inflicted the injury was made to pay for the stretcher bearers.

After trekking nearly three miles, we reached Ringmo, our next camp, where the track from Kathmandu to Namche Bazar joined our route.

We had gradually climbed up to a height of about 10,000 feet and had camped on another beautiful alp. Even before most of us had reached the camp, our wireless detachment made contact with Kathmandu at three in the afternoon. We received a couple of cheering messages, including one from Mr. Sarin on behalf of the Sponsoring Committee.

In addition to the 'walkie talkie' sets which we were going to use for establishing contact between various camps on the mountain, we had powerful sets for direct wireless communication with Kathmandu. From Kathmandu our messages were sent to Delhi on a similar link, which had been arranged through the courtesy of the Army authorities and our Ambassador to Nepal.

At about 9 o'clock the next morning, we reached a pass at 10,500 feet, from where we descended a few hundred feet to reach the famous Takshindu Monastery. We were met outside the building by the Head Lama and other Lamas who brought some potent looking pink liquid in eight or nine small glasses. The strong odour made it obvious that it was not a very well matured *rakshi*. I did not wish to drink, but the ritual had to be performed and I was advised to dip the index finger of my right hand in the liquid and flick a few drops in the air.

Before entering the Monastery a donation book was brought by the Head Lama. We made a token donation and entered the premises. In a small room outside the Monastery, we saw a cylindrical prayer wheel about five feet in diameter and about ten feet high. The prayer wheel had leather straps attached to its rim which we held and walked round clockwise turning the wheel as we went. In the courtyard of the Monastery was hung an empty oxygen cylinder of some earlier expedition. This was used by the Lamas as a gong.

We had to climb down a few thousand feet to reach our next camp at Khari Khola which was full of the most gorgeous orchids; on the surrounding hills rhododendrons and magnolias were in bloom. These flowers presented a most colourful sight.

We left Khari Khola at six-thirty in the morning of March 18, the 13th day of our trek to Everest. We had to climb nearly one thousand feet and then descend to the river *Dudh Kosi*. It was a fast flowing river with bluish green water. The thought that these waters came straight from the Everest region thrilled us. Crossing the river on a rickety log bridge took a long time as we had to go over the frail bridge one by one.

That afternoon, we received an encouraging message from Mr. Sarin informing us that Grewal was expected in Jaynagar with the oxygen consignment in a couple of days. He said that all foreign consignments had been received, including the transistor radio sets. My first despatch had already appeared in the *Times of India*. The second article had reached Delhi and was due to appear in two or three days' time. Little did we know that there was a hitch about the oxygen at the last moment. Grewal had found that on fitting the regulators on the nozzle, there was a leakage in the valve. Mr. Sarin and Grewal had some anxious moments. Two more cylinders had to be sent to Bombay for a further check. There was little time. The commercial aircraft operating on the service to Bombay were not willing to carry material like oxygen which facilitates combustion. The Air Force was contacted and Air Vice-Marshal Pinto agreed to fly out the cylinders in a Canberra bomber. Within a matter of a few hours, the cylinders were in Bombay. The leakage could not be stopped and Grewal again contacted Mr. Sarin in Delhi. Mr. Sarin

put him on to the Army engineers who detected the cause of trouble; after a small adjustment they succeeded in stopping the leakage, and all was well.

And then, there was a complication regarding the despatch of the oxygen cylinders by a passenger train. According to Railway regulations, not more than 15 gas bottles could be carried by any one train. An exception could only be made by the Chief Inspector of Explosives. Grewal booked frantic trunk calls to Nagpur to convince the Chief Inspector that the bottles were very safely packed and that there was no danger if the whole consignment consisting of 120 bottles was permitted to be despatched by one mail train. Permission was finally given and the Central Railways were very co-operative and allotted a complete van and detailed one inspector to accompany the consignment to Jaynagar.

The next day's journey was through some of the most beautiful forests we had so far seen. On account of the height, however, the rhododendrons appeared to be a little stunted and the colour of the flowers was of a much lighter shade than that of the ones we had seen earlier. Crossing another pass from where we could see Cho-Oyu, the turquoise Goddess, Sonam and Keki nostalgically talked about their expedition to this beautiful mountain.

We had now entered the Khumbu district, and could see that instead of the mellow beauty of Solu, with its gradual slopes, alps and fields, Khumbu looked raw and rugged. Because of the nature of the terrain cultivation was restricted and the people looked poorer. At about midday we reached our camp at Puiyan situated in the midst of a magnolia forest, through which flowed a small stream.

That afternoon we had a full conference and drew out a detailed programme for our acclimatisation training around Pangboche where we were to spend the next three weeks.

As we went through the villages, there were scenes of many joyous welcomes and heart-warming reunions. Large number of people came out as we passed the villages. The arrival of an expedition was always welcome because it brought money to the valley.

On the way an old lady was offering free *chhang* to everyone. She

was doing this in memory of her husband who had died some time ago. Many villagers offered us hot boiled potatoes as we went through the villages.

When we left our next camp on March 21, we knew we had only a short distance to go because we had decided not to camp in Namche Bazar village. Instead, we planned to stay at the junction of the *Dudh Kosi* and the *Bhote Kosi* rivers, a mile and a half short of Namche Bazar.

When we reached our camp at about two in the afternoon, we felt a definite nip in the air. Later it became cold and windy and towards the evening we saw the first flakes of snow drifting down gently. This was a signal for us to change our attire. Most of the way from Jaynagar we had been wearing large-brimmed felt hats to protect us from the sun, a cotton sports shirt, a pair of shorts and excellent hiking boots made by Bata. We now took out our heavier climbing boots with hard rubber soles. Hereafter, we would be climbing heights far in excess of 12,000 feet. We took out our woollen clothes, but we continued using the felt hats during the day when the sun was very bright and hot in the clear air of the mountains. In the evenings we wore balaclava caps, jerseys and feather jackets, but we decided not to wear gloves till after the Base Camp.

That night it snowed heavily and one of the big mess tents collapsed on account of the weight of the snow. Six or seven members who were trapped inside extricated themselves with some difficulty and had to find shelter in other tents.

The next morning the Sardar reported that the porters from the plains and foothills would not go further because of the snow. They did not have proper shoes and were not adequately clad for these conditions. There were nearly two hundred such porters, so we were forced to halt at the camp for a day. The unwilling porters had to be paid off and we sent Sherpas to the various villages to look for new porters. The assignment was accepted willingly, because this was an ideal opportunity for them to go and visit their friends and relations. That afternoon as we finished paying off the two hundred porters, the second party caught up with us and camped a few hundred yards behind our camp.

Since we were stopping for the day, we decided to spend it on indoor training, particularly as this was the first time after reaching Jaynagar that all the members and Sherpas were together.

Nanda gave an introductory talk and demonstration on the wireless sets. This was followed by practice in establishing communication and in wireless procedure. Bhagwanani gave an interesting talk on eye troubles, particularly snow blindness; its causes and prevention. Rao spoke about meteorological data and interpretation of weather forecasts.

That afternoon we received a message from Delhi which read as follows: "Personal for Brigadier Gyan Singh from Sarin. Meeting of the Executive Council of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute held in Prime Minister's House yesterday. Council was greatly interested in good progress made so far by the expedition. Prime Minister, Dr. B.C. Roy and other members of the Council send their good wishes for success in all your endeavours. Their thoughts will be with you until you return to India." We were thrilled to get the message, but it also made us homesick.

The next morning, the March 22, was the coldest we had experienced since leaving Jaynagar. We were all looking forward to reaching Namche Bazar. After a steep climb, we reached the crest of the ridge nearly half-way to Namche Bazar. Here we saw Everest again. It had a heavy snow-drift plume flying like a banner from its top. Nuptse and many other lesser peaks could also be seen from this point. The track was inclined to be slightly slippery due to frozen snow. The fresh snow on the slopes and on the trees gave a wintery look, but there was bright sunshine and a strong glare.

As we climbed slowly up the steep zig-zag track towards Namche, we could see a continuous stream of men, women and children running down towards our last camp in the hope of getting some loads to carry. Some of these people had come from Thamy, Tenzing's village, and others from even more distant places. Amongst these people I could recognise a number of Sherpas who had, at one time or the other, worked as porters for our Basic Courses in Darjeel-

ing. On seeing me they would stop for a few seconds, smile and say a few words, then hurry down even faster to regain the time lost in these greetings.

We did not see Namche Bazar until we arrived within its own perimeter. Situated in a hollow bowl, it appeared to be completely shut off from view or wind on all sides. The houses were built in rows on the slopes. The place looked like a large amphitheatre.

We called at the house of Mrs. Gyalzen, a distant cousin of Tenzing, who had gone all the way to Jaynagar with her husband who was employed as one of our Sardars. She greeted us at the door of her house and led us into the living room. The kitchen and pantry were next door. Here, on a big fire burning under an ineffective chimney, three or four women were busy cooking food, frying eggs and brewing tea. At one end of the room, there were a number of trunks and boxes with markings which showed Gyalzen's association as a Sardar or high-altitude Sherpa with numerous expeditions. There were many items of equipment like rucksacks, ice-axes, nylon ropes, water bottles and climbing boots, neatly arranged on shelves and hanging on the walls.

The rest of the room looked like a curio shop, with hundreds of odds and ends arranged on shelves. There were attractive brass and copper utensils, some of Tibetan origin, bottles, photographs, mirrors and numerous things collected over the years. The general effect in the room was one of cosiness; but what impressed us most was the warmth of the hearts of the people who lived in it.

Mrs. Gyalzen approached me with a glass of *chhang*. I folded my hands and said that I did not wish to drink. But she would not take 'no' for an answer. She signalled to her burly looking sister and the two proceeded to force the drink down my throat. Embarrassed, I dipped a couple of my fingers in the milky liquid and put it on my lips as a token of having accepted the drink, but that was not good enough; I must drink. The boys were all quite amused at my embarrassment. Two of them rushed up with their cameras to photograph me being woman-handled.

After the drinks, *thukpa*, a Sherpa dish made with minced meat,

rice and spices, was brought in. While we ate, the two ladies sang some Sherpa songs and Rajendra Vikram recorded their haunting music on the tape recorder.



Next we called on Incarnate Lama of Thyangboche. He was happy to see an Indian expedition going to Chomolungma. He recalled Tenzing's visit and the assistance given by him and the Sherpas of Darjeeling in carrying out the repairs of the monastery. After drinking tea served in delicate Tibetan cups, I stood up and bowed again to take my leave. The Incarnate Lama said that he would offer a prayer every day for our safe return until we came back from the mountain.

It was nearly mid-day when we left the Monastery for our camp sited in the fields enclosed by low stone walls. There was no habitation nearby. The nearest village, Pangboche, was across the river Imja Khola.

We spent the afternoon checking up stores, reorganising the layout and paying off most of the porters, which was a painfully slow process. There were many porters of the same name, quite a few had lost their number discs and to add to the confusion some of the porters had inadvertently mixed up their identity discs. I sat at the pay table for a couple of hours and found that there were dozens of *Pasangs*, and among the women, perhaps as many *Phutis*.

That evening I was handed a wireless message which brought the sad news of the death of Thondup's wife in Darjeeling. We all felt very sorry and offered our condolences to him. After he recovered from the initial shock, he came to me with tears in his eyes and announced that he wished to leave. He said he was very unhappy to leave the expedition even before we got to the Base Camp, but he had small children and there was nobody to look after them. I promised to send a telegram to Tenzing to make arrangements about the children's welfare, but Thondup felt that in this hour of misfortune his place was with his family. We did not wish to persuade him any further although we knew we were going to miss him. Thondup was not only an excellent cook, but was one of God's own men. During my European tour both Hunt and Egger had talked about him in affectionate terms. His experience and advice on routine administration and selection of camp sites had been invaluable to us. He was popular and respected. Before he left the members made a collection and gave him three hundred and one rupees as a gift. Thondup was the oldest member of our party and with his mature experience and sound judgment he was an asset to the expedition. We were to miss him throughout the expedition.

*... to climb steep hills
Requires slow pace at first.*

— SHAKESPEARE

8

Acclimatisation Exercises

On the morning of March 25, we got all the Sherpas together and checked them against the list sent to the Government of Nepal. We had employed 55 Sherpas, including cooks and Sardars. The day was spent in checking up equipment and issuing kits to the members and Sherpas.

That afternoon Rajendra Vikram was asked to give his first introductory talk on the oxygen equipment. We had selected nearly twenty Sherpas for high-altitude work and they were also required to attend the lecture. It was evident that they did not understand any of the technical details. We, however, succeeded in making them familiar with the working of the apparatus. Sonam Girmi, the assistant Sardar, was made to wear the oxygen mask for demonstration. Later, Gombu put on the mask and with the oxygen switched on at four litres a minute ran up and down the hill for a short time. He returned panting and declared that the oxygen was no good. Moreover, the wearing of the mask caused discomfort. Das, our physiologist, carried out some tests on blood and urine and also checked up the vital capacity of all members. He also gave us what he called the mental efficiency test which consisted of doing some very simple addition sums in five minutes. He weighed all the members and found that no one had lost any weight during the three weeks or so that we had been on the march.

In the evening we heard the All India Radio programme covering our departure from Jaynagar, which included my address.

The first ferry party of 200 porters left under the assistant Sardar, Sonam Girmi, to dump some loads at the Base Camp on March 26.

Meanwhile the three groups of climbers spent the morning drawing up plans for their acclimatisation training. A co-ordinating conference was held to finalise the acclimatisation plan. The three teams had, by then, worked out the details of their respective programmes.

Both Sir John Hunt and Tenzing had advised me that we should not rush on to the mountain until all the members were thoroughly used to living at progressively increasing altitudes. Our doctors explained that the important aspect of acclimatisation was to get used to the progressive lack of oxygen in the atmosphere. They said that human beings normally need a certain minimum quantity of oxygen to live and work. As the altitude increases, the pressure of air is reduced and proportionately the pressure of the oxygen content of the air also decreases. Thus, at about 18,000 feet, the air pressure is nearly half of what it is at sea level, so that at 18,000 feet a man, for a given volume of air, gets half the molecules of oxygen which he would get at sea level. The lack of oxygen is, therefore, bound to affect him adversely if he was suddenly taken to a height of 18,000 feet.

The second party had planned to go to the Dingboche area, north of Ama Dablam, from where they were to climb the surrounding peaks. This party was required to reach the Base Camp by April 12, when it would relieve the first party on the ice-fall, which was then to return to Labuje Camp for a short rest at a lower altitude.

After the conference, the doctor gave a lecture on first-aid which was followed by some practical work on the use of equipment and medicines in the first aid kits which had been prepared for each party. Members were given practical training in the identification of medicines and recognition of simple symptoms of high-altitude sickness. First aid lectures were also attended by some of the Sherpas. In the afternoon, there was a demonstration on the use of plastic explosives for felling dangerous ice towers on the mountain.

Bhagwanani and I had decided to climb a rock peak near our camp. Distances and heights in the mountains are deceptive and our objective did not turn out to be as near as we had thought. The rocks and boulders mixed with deep snow were not too easy to negotiate. As it was the first day, we took it easy and climbed slowly. The last 20 or 25

feet of the rock presented a fairly difficult but interesting scramble, so we took the precaution of roping up. Bhagwanani was the less experienced of the two, so I led on the rope but I must confess I was not performing well. One of the Sherpas offered to belay me from the top of the rock, but instead of just keeping the rope tight he was literally trying to haul me up like a sack of potatoes. To add to my indignity, Lakpa Sherpa, an old friend of mine, pushed me from below. It was not at all necessary and I kept on protesting to them, but the two Sherpas were going to make sure that the *Burra Sahab* reached the top of the rock. When we reached near the top, we saw Kohli, Misra and three Sherpas already there.

A number of climbers had slightly inflamed eyes. This was due to their not using snow goggles. The rays of the sun consist of visual spectrum, infra-red rays and ultra-violet rays. On the snow when the sky is clear and the sun bright the glare effect due to the excessive brightness of the visual spectrum causes strong burning sensation in the eyes. If the exposure is prolonged, the conjunctiva or white of the eyes become red and are very painful. The condition is transitory and can be avoided by wearing sun glasses. Infra-red rays on the other hand are heat rays as opposed to light rays and at higher altitude concentration of heat radiation increases. If the eyes are exposed to these rays, conjunctivitis or common sore eyes occur and the eyes become red and watery and again there is a burning sensation. There is also a feeling that the eyes are full of sand particles. Concentration of this kind of radiation can burn the conjunctiva, the sensitive nerve membrane inside the eye, which normally receives the image of the things we see. If these burns reach the retina, permanent blind spots in the visual field are caused. One can experience this in the plains when one observes a solar eclipse. At lower altitudes, these rays are absorbed by the air. In fact, even up to a height of 10,000 feet, there is satisfactory absorption of these rays by ozone in the air.

During the British expedition, the first party of porters led by Hillary to the Base Camp had suffered badly on account of snow blindness because there was fresh snowfall and the porters had no goggles. Hillary ingeniously devised protection for the porters' eyes with the help of cardboard, black tape and coloured celluloid pieces.

A bandage of black cloth with slit holes for the eyes and the application of black soot under the eyes also gives some protection. We had provided for more than two pairs of goggles for each climber and high altitude Sherpa, and having learnt from Hillary's experience with the porters, we had also brought nearly 250 pairs of cheap goggles to be used by the porters who were to ferry the loads to the Base Camp.

On the second day of acclimatisation training, our parties went up again in different directions. Kohli and Da Namgyal climbed a peak of 18,400 feet to the north-west of the camp. The weather forecast for the day was not favourable. We were not very happy to know this as the meteorological forecasts broadcast by All India Radio had been very accurate.



मनस्वी कार्यार्थो न गणपति दुःखं न च सुखम्

A determined person intent on accomplishing his task heeds not pain or pleasure.

— BHARTRIHARI

9

Training for the Heights

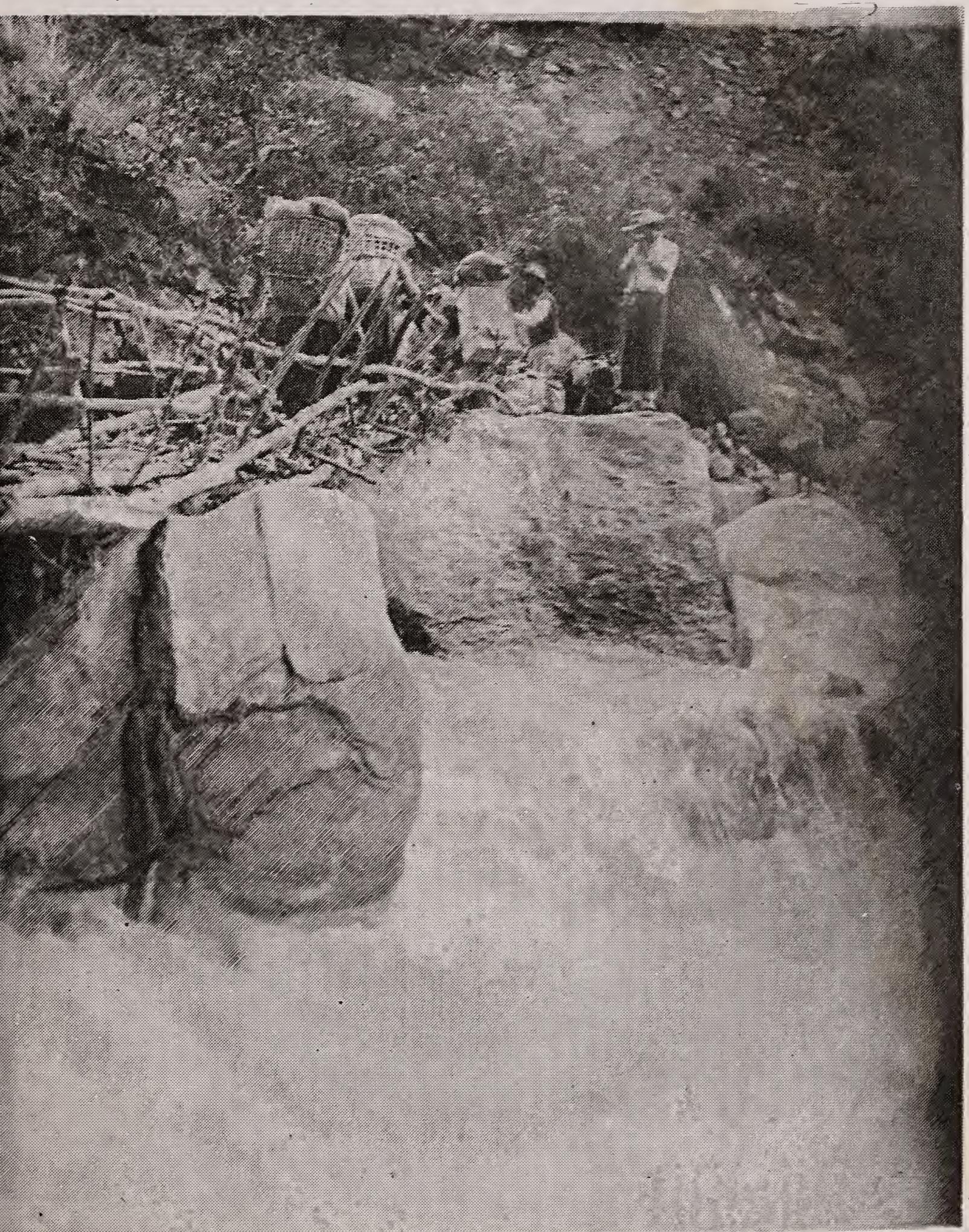
Immediately above our camp, there was a thick forest of rhododendrons not higher than fifteen or twenty feet. The other surrounding hills were also covered with vegetation up to 15,000 feet. There were juniper bushes and reasonably good grazing up to 15,000 or 16,000 feet.

During our approach march we were a little disappointed at not seeing much wild life, but the inevitable Himalayan crow and the large ravens were always there, scavenging round the camps. We had also seen golden Himalayan eagles and some snow pigeons. But somehow choughs, which are always there in large numbers in most mountainous areas, had not been seen, except one or two in the Solu district on our way up. Choughs had been observed earlier at very high altitudes by various expeditions. According to the late Major Jayal, one particular chough had followed them to all the camps on Kamet, and in fact he sighted this friendly bird even from the summit.

The hill to the south of our camp appeared to be a favourite spot for musk deers. During our climb on this hill a few days earlier, we had noticed their droppings at about a hundred different places. However, none of us saw any of the animals, presumably because they had moved to another area after we established our camp at Pangboche.

On the hills to the north of Imja Khola, Sonam and 'Chow' had seen two *barahls* a species of a mountain goat. It was obvious that these animals had never been shot at because they were not at all scared of us. Many other members had sighted *barahls* during their

Negotiating a crevasse

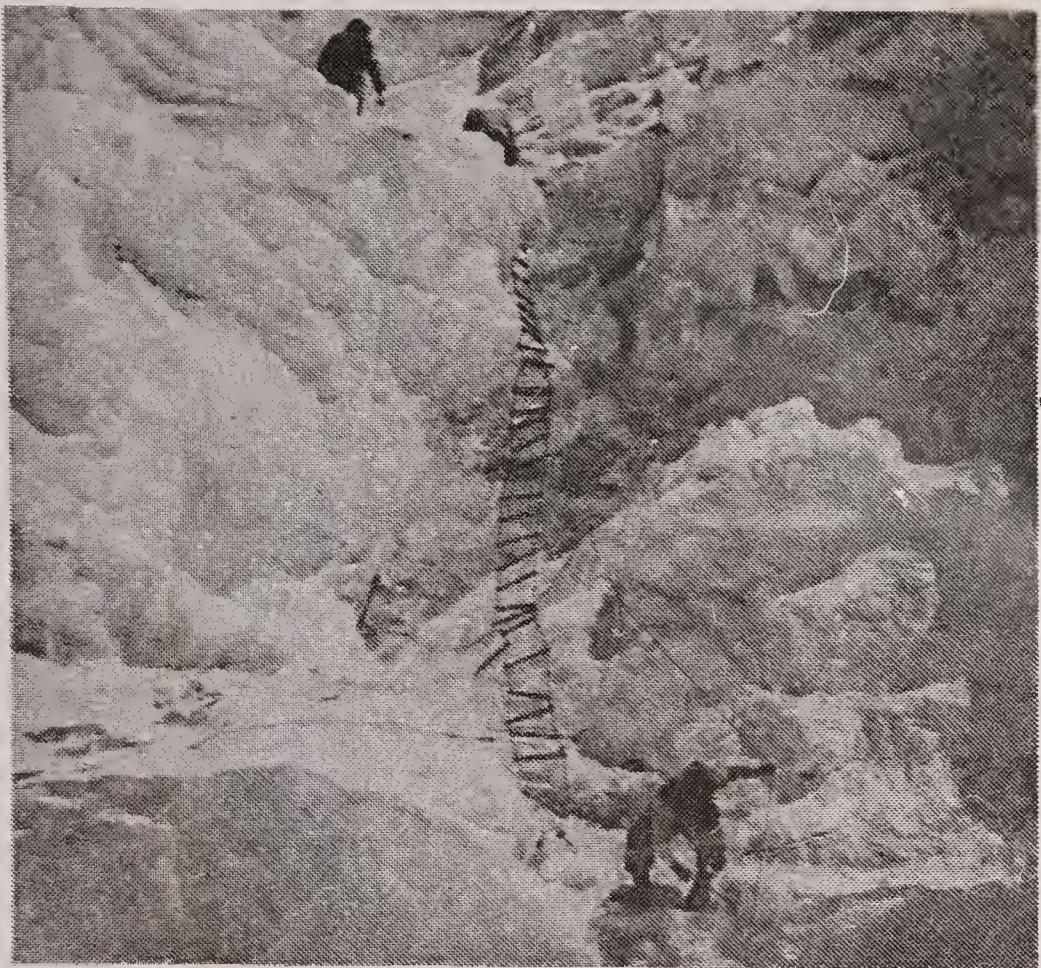




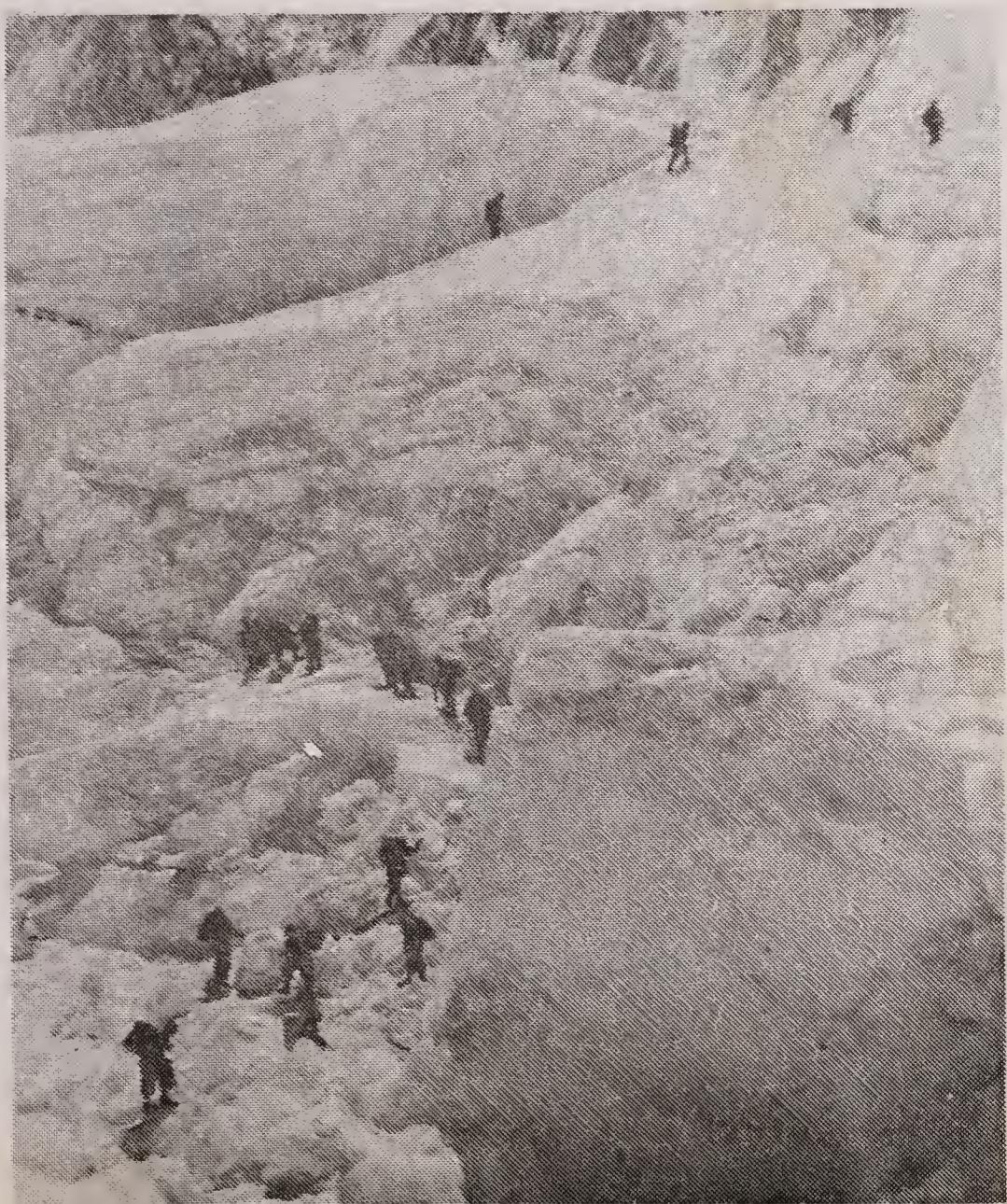
Crossing the Sun Kosi

Finalising the acclimatisation plan





The Khumbu ice-fall



The Khumbu ice-fall
above Camp I



JOURNEY TO THE PEAK

Legend

B.C. : Base Camp

I-VII : The various Camps on the way to the Summit.

X : The highest point (28,300 ft) reached by three members of the Expedition.

climb and were surprised to find this normally shy animal behaving like domesticated cattle. Some of us had also seen hill fox, woodcock and hill partridge up to 17,000 feet.

A party of our non-climbing members, Gopal—the photographer, Rao—the meteorologist, and Rai—the Liaison officer, and the two signallers climbed Pangboche peak. They were not experienced mountaineers and when they returned Das noticed that nearly all of them looked dehydrated because they had not taken enough water, tea or coffee with them.

Dehydration is a very expressive word and implies literally the drying-up of the body. Water is the major and most important component of the body, and constitutes about seventy per cent of the body-weight. Therefore, its lack is bound to have a significant effect on health. Somehow this is a factor which is most commonly neglected. Out of the seventy per cent water content of the body some small percentage, which approximates to about three litres, exists in the blood. Nearly a quarter of it is in the tissue fluids and the major part is in body cells. For proper physical and mental functioning, it is essential to maintain the correct water proportion in the body.

The normal daily water loss from the body at a temperature of about 90° F. is approximately eight pints, but this goes up considerably with the increase in temperature because of excessive sweating. Trials conducted by the Army have shown that at atmospheric temperature of 105° F. an infantry soldier, who has walked 15 miles, has to replace twenty pints of water. On the mountains very high temperatures are quite common, and Everest expeditions have recorded open sun temperature of 158° F. Therefore, at higher altitudes, when a climber is subjected to severe physical exertion in the blazing sun, he sweats profusely. In sweating one loses not only water but considerable quantities of salt which also has to be replaced. Therefore, to combat dehydration, the correct level of water and salt must be restored.

While a man can be acclimatised to a certain extent to low oxygen tension and to cold, acclimatisation is not possible so far as dehydration is concerned; and the only remedy is to keep on replacing the lost fluids.

Salt deficiency, on the other hand, creates symptoms of lassitude and apathy. There is muscular weakness and a tendency to giddiness. The skin becomes dry and inelastic and there is also a feeling of nausea and vomiting, thus exaggerating the normal altitude sickness.

From the very beginning, we had taken ample precautions to combat dehydration. During our approach marches, the doctors used to give us a salt tablet every day. This was not popular with some members who could not retain the salt in that form. They were advised to put a few pinches of salt in their water bottles. We also drank considerable quantities of lime juice with salt and a little sugar. It was a delicious drink and was very popular. The necessity of drinking fluids had to be impressed on every member and Sherpa at this stage because as we climbed higher, there would be a tendency to decrease the load and perhaps not to take water in water bottles, and tea or coffee in the flasks.

There was considerable work to be done to provide kits to the various parties each of which had 10 high-altitude Sherpas with it. They had to calculate the requirements of tents, technical stores and food for the next few days, while they climbed independently. The stores and equipment had to be distributed and repacked and the climbers and Sherpas were busy till late in the evening, nailing up boxes and generally getting ready for the next morning's move.

Our party's first target was the rock feature immediately to the north of our camp. We left at eight in the morning soon after breakfast. For the first half of the climb, it was a uniformly steep gradient, but later on it entailed fairly difficult rock scrambling with good holds on the rock. According to Vohra, the geologist, it was mostly schist and granite. Da Namgyal, who led the first rope, made everyone rope up. We reached the highest point of the ridge that afternoon. According to the description given in Eggler's book, the Swiss expedition of 1956 was also trained in this area and one of the parties had actually climbed this peak. We found a large cairn made by the Swiss to which we added a few stones.

The next day was a day of rest for the climbers and I returned to Pangboche where I had left a small headquarters group. On arrival at

Pangboche Camp, I met Party No. III which had returned after training on Taweche feature. The party had camped at an altitude of nearly 14,700 feet and had attempted the rock peaks to the left of Taweche. They did some interesting rock climbing up to a height of 18,400 feet, and also carried out some training on the ice.

Two days later, Gombu, Sonam and 'Chow' of Party No. III prepared to leave for Dingboche Camp on the way to the Chunkung camp, but Rajendra Vikram had to stay behind to repair the tape recorder.

That evening when Rajendra Vikram asked me to give an account of our acclimatisation programme for recording on the tape, Kumar was allowed to tell the story of his Party's ascent on the Yellow needle, a sharp pointed peak which was given this name by the Swiss expedition. Kumar believed that this was a virgin peak because he had not read the complete account of the previous Swiss expedition to this peak. The Swiss party had returned from the base of the Yellow needle on the first day, but had climbed the peak the following day. Kumar was disappointed, particularly because he had to re-record his story on the tape, leaving out the reference to the No. II Party having climbed a virgin peak.

We left the camp late because some porters had gone for shelter to a nearby village. As we left Pheriche camp, we could not help noticing that we had left the tree-line far behind. We could, however, still see some tall juniper bushes sticking out of snow, but as we moved up through this bleak looking country to Labuje, at a height of 16,500 feet, there was hardly any vegetation. Around Labuje also we could see only small juniper bushes and dwarf rhododendrons. This camp was located in a sheltered place and boasted of two yak huts, which were to serve as our rest camp.

We reorganised our porters once again and after keeping a hundred of them to ferry loads from Labuje to the Base Camp we paid off the rest. Bad weather forced another day of rest on us.

Leaving behind a small party consisting of 'Khalifa' Grewal, Sohan Singh, Rao, Rai, the Liaison Officer and Rajendra Vikram, the No. II Party and the headquarters group left for the Base Camp. The No.

III Party was expected at Labuje the following day and was scheduled to accompany the rear party to the Base Camp on April 12.



Next day we had to trek on the Khumbu glacier to reach the Base Camp. It was a comparatively easy march but our progress was very slow because we had to stop frequently to identify various features or to take photographs. There was a scope for many good pictures as the train of porters wended their way through a forest of seracs on the glacier.

बिघ्नैर्मुहुरपि प्रतिहन्यमानाः प्रारब्धमुत्तमगुणा न परित्यजन्ति ।

Though confronted by obstacles the strong-minded never give up the task undertaken.

— BHARTRIHARI

10

First Big Hurdle—The Ice-Fall

We were greeted by Keki and some Sherpas who came to meet us outside the camp.

He showed me round the Base Camp which was located where the Khumbu glacier bent sharply to the south-west after flowing down the steep gradient between Nuptse and Everest's western shoulder. The tents were put up on the surface moraine and some of them seemed to be wedged between sharp-edged stones and boulders. Some pinnacles of blue ice protruding through the moraine showed that there was a hard ice-crust under the debris.

Keki explained that his party had arrived there on April 6, but were unable to put in any appreciable amount of work on account of the heavy snowfall during the first four days. On April 10, after a very arduous day, Ang Temba, Kohli and five Sherpas, followed by Keki, were able to achieve the most creditable feat of establishing Camp I, which was two-thirds of the way up on the ice-fall, in one day.

Everest was not visible from the Base Camp. The gateway leading to it was formed by Nuptse to the right and the western shoulder of Everest to the left. Between these two massive bastions lay the very broken section of the Khumbu glacier, which was to be our first hurdle and which was the only approach to the mountain.

I could not keep my eyes off the awe-inspiring cascade of ice with all its horrifying hazards. We knew that the ice was constantly moving and even as we looked at it, it was changing imperceptibly. Through this maze of colossal humps, fissures, steep walls and top-

pling blocks of ice, which was nearly half a mile wide, the climbers had to find a route to the top. The approaches from either side of the glacier, near Nuptse and the western shoulder, looked comparatively easier, but these approaches had to be avoided because of the danger of avalanches which hurtled down many times a day. Hence the route had to be as near the centre as possible even though the movement and consequent shifting of ice was likely to be the greatest there. Therefore, the climbers would have to mark the route with coloured flags and keep repairing and altering the track to cope with the changes that the ice-fall produced every day.

After the spearhead of No. I Party had established Camp I, Jungalwala, with some Sherpas, improved the route and made it secure for high-altitude Sherpa porters coming up with loads. This entailed fixing log bridges on crevasses which were too wide to jump across, finding deviations on the route to avoid dangerous sections, carving handholds and steps on the steeper gradients and marking the route with coloured flags of which we had more than 250 with us.

Later, as I was writing my planning note in my tent when Kippa, one of the mess servants, came running and asked me to come to the Mess tent. According to him there were 50 candles burning in the Mess tent and all the other members were waiting for me. I wondered what they could be celebrating with such extravagance. A little later I was surprised to find the Mess tent lavishly illuminated with numerous candles. As I entered, the boys burst out into a chorus, singing "happy birthday to you". I suddenly remembered that it was my 42nd birthday. The quartermaster had even got the cook to prepare a birthday cake.

After the ceremony, I was anxious to know the progress of the day's work. Jungalwala, who was now back, told us how he and Bhagwanani lay in their sleeping bags that morning waiting for Keki and Phurumba to join them. He thought that the No. II Party would come after Keki, but was surprised to hear a couple of Sherpas arrive before 8 a.m. to announce that No. II Party was not very far behind. Jungalwala and Bhagwanani leapt out of their sleeping bags and after dressing up themselves quickly, left with their Sherpas for the top of

the ice-fall. They even skipped their breakfast because they did not want No. II Party to take over an incomplete task.

After reaching the high-altitude tent left by Ang Temba and Kohli, Jungalwala looked for a possible route beyond. He noticed that the ice there, was in a bad shape. Instead of smaller crevasses which could be jumped across or bridged, there were gaping bergschrunds (large crevasses) separating the upper lip of the glacier from the confused mass of ice on the steeper section of the ice-fall. After going down to a ledge in the chasm he jumped across a narrow crevasse and climbed up a steep ridge to discover that there were many more such obstacles beyond. Disappointed at not being able to complete the work which he had set out to do, he wisely waited for more mature advice and help and let Kumar and Da Namgyal catch up with him. According to Da Namgyal the condition of the ice only confirmed his doubts about the state of the glacier. He did not think it would take very long to get into the Western Cwm but it was clear that some real hard work would have to be done before they could make Camp II. After completing the reconnaissance for the next day's work, Da Namgyal and Kumar returned with No. I Party to the Base Camp. Unable to catch up with Jungalwala, Keki had climbed some distance beyond Camp I and returned to the Base Camp after taking many photographs.

That afternoon I sent a message to Kumar at the Base Camp on our 'walkie-talkie' set advising him to improve the route, including blowing up of some dangerous ice-towers.

It was my first day in a camp on the ice-fall. I had expected it to be quite cold and had, therefore, overclothed myself. Although we were surrounded by ice and actually sleeping on the glacier, I found the tent too warm and had to take off some of my clothes.

But after the sunset, the outside temperature dropped suddenly. Therefore, we retired to the warmth of our cosy tents fairly early although we did not go to sleep.

The following day Da Namgyal left very early with some Sherpas. Misra, Lakpa and I had decided to leave at eight after breakfast. The most tedious and time-consuming part of preparing a meal on the mountain is to melt ice or snow into water. The three of us were

sitting round two primus stoves inside one of the Jamet tents and were waiting for the water to boil, when one of us made an awkward movement and toppled the stove on which a saucepan of water had been placed. We had to start melting the snow all over again, and this seemingly small incident delayed our departure by more than one hour.

After a frugal breakfast, we started for the climb to the top of the ice-fall. It took us nearly three hours to reach the farthest point upto which a proper route had already been opened. We were then almost on level with the lower end of the narrow valley between Everest massif and Nuptse, but we could see a number of dark linear shadows which we found were large bergschrunds. The Nuptse wall rose almost vertically to our right and the Western shoulder to our left looked just as massive.

On April 15, when I reached the Base Camp, I found three or four persons bunched round somebody lying on the ground outside the big Mess tent. Das, our doctor, was leaning over and the Sherpa Sardar was calling out to some Sherpas to come. On reaching the Mess tent I was told that Rai, the Liaison Officer of the Government of Nepal, had suddenly taken ill. He was all right the night before, but in the morning he complained of a severe headache and was extremely restless. Even before the doctor could come he had become unconscious. Das gave him blood plasma and oxygen as well as a couple of injections. I could see the sense of urgency in Das's eyes, but he was quite unruffled and told me that he had to move the patient to a lower altitude without delay. I was, however, very worried and said that everything else must take second place and Rai's safety was our first concern.

Within a few minutes Rai was put on an improvised stretcher and carried down to Labuje by the Sherpas. 'Khalifa' Grewal accompanied the party and carried a wireless set with him. Movement over the moraine was difficult because in addition to carrying the awkward load of an improvised stretcher, the Sherpas had to carry an oxygen bottle alongside, because the patient had to be fed with oxygen all the time. We were relieved when a wireless message came through a couple of hours later that Rai had come round though he was still

weak. It was then that Das told me that Rai was suffering from an acute failure of acclimatisation.



When I started from Camp I for the Base Camp, I had left the No. II Party busy organising its equipment and stores for its move to Camp II. The activities of the Party were graphically described by Kumar who wrote in his diary.

“April 15—Place: Camp II—Although I am sitting at 20,000 feet and incidentally this would be the highest camp I have ever slept in, I am not feeling cold at all. In fact it is quite warm, even in the evening at seven, and I am wearing only a warm shirt....

“I consider it a great privilege to be one of the first to spend the night under the shadow of Everest. I hope I am able to sleep because I am too excited....

“Now looking at Everest I am becoming more and more confident that we will make it. Even at 20,000 feet I am not feeling the ill effects of the altitude....

“Tomorrow we have to find a route through the very badly broken and crevassed surface of the Cwm. I understand this is the Welsh way of spelling the word ‘Coomb’, pronounced ‘Coom’. It means an enclosed valley on the flank of a hill....”

चित्रार्पितारम्भ इवावतस्थे।

Nature around looked almost a painted picture

— KALIDASA

11

The Western Cwm

On my way down with Misra and Lakpa, we found 'Khalifa' Grewal sitting alone on a moraine ridge. He was very pleased to see us for he had lost his way and did not know which direction to take. The snow had melted during the last two or three days and the landscape had changed considerably.

On the afternoon of April 18, Kumar and Vohra arrived from the Base Camp for a spell of rest. We had no wireless communication with the Base Camp, so we were quite anxious to get up-to-date news about their progress on the mountain.

When Da Namgyal and Kumar left Camp II, on April 16, it was a clear day, but the morning wind made it very chilly. They had hardly gone a few yards when they were confronted with a big crevasse.

Camp III was established on April 16, at a height of 21,200 feet. This was to develop into quite a place. It became the Advance Base Camp—a firm base for work beyond. Kumar and Da Namgyal knew that they had to give the green signal to start the transportation of rations, equipment, tentage and oxygen for which a plan had already been made.

Camp III was their target for the day, but they were so encouraged with day's work that they decided to go ahead and carry out a reconnaissance for Camp IV. They had finished the water and coffee which they had brought with them, and were feeling parched and dehydrated in the intense heat. But they kept climbing until, they reached a place immediately below Lhotse Face. This was the site of the camp of earlier expeditions. From here they could see the south-

east ridge of Everest from the South Col to the south Summit. They had not brought any extra tent. However, they marked the site with a flag and started on the down-hill journey towards Camp III and Camp II.

Some Sherpas had told us earlier that the Swiss expedition of 1956 had left nearly 40 boxes of food and some oxygen cylinders in the area of their Advance Base Camp. During the return journey Da Namgyal and Kumar spent nearly half an hour looking for these treasures, but they could not find any trace of the food or the equipment.

On arrival at Camp II they were met by Vohra who had brought up the rations, equipment and additional tentage from the Base Camp that morning. Da Namgyal and Kumar had initially planned to return to the Base Camp the same day, but after their very fatiguing trip they decided to sleep in Camp II.

As the Sherpas were leaving I checked up their loads and found that while most of them were carrying the correct loads as well as their personal equipment, food and water, there were some who had left their wind-proof suits and water bottles behind in order to reduce their load. They had been told that they must take plenty of fluids but they considered this as the *Burra Sahab*'s fad and generally avoided taking this precaution. So I told them that I would be very severe if I found any Sherpa disregarding my instructions. By way of a practical demonstration I made them file past their cook-house where they were served a mug of water each. This seemed to amuse them quite a lot, but everyone drank the water before he left, perhaps more to humour me than because they felt that they needed it.

No. III Party were able to send us a report on their progress through letters brought by the Sherpas who went up with the loads. On April 21, Gombu and Sonam returned to the Base Camp and gave me a report on the work done in the Cwm and on Lhotse Face. The report said:

“April 19: at Camp II Chowdhury controlled the transhipment of loads from the Base Camp to Camp III. Sonam, Gombu and a few Sherpas went up to Camp IV where, after leaving their heavy loads, they moved forward to look for a

route to Camp V. Before leaving they had seen a route, marked on the map, which was taken by the Swiss expedition of 1956, but they found it impossible to take because of very big crevasses. Therefore, they worked their way slightly to the right and carried out a reconnaissance for about six hundred feet beyond Camp IV and returned after a fairly tiring day. They had found the foot of Lhotse Face quite cold. The temperature that night was minus eighteen degrees centigrade.

April 20: Chowdhury led a team of loaded Sherpas to Camp III while Sonam and Gombu worked their way towards Camp V supported by some Sherpas. They found that they had to cut steps most of the way and had to fix three rope lines with ice pitons which were quite difficult to drive into the hard ice. They also found a hundred feet of manila rope line left by the Swiss expedition. They made use of this rope for their own fixed line. They hoped to establish Camp V that day, but the wind was very strong, so after dumping a tent, a composite package of rations and a nylon rope, they returned to Camp IV quite exhausted."

They had hoped to keep going up on the April 21, but the wind became stronger and the weather turned quite bad. They had been four days on the mountain and had slept four nights at Camp IV, which was at a height of 22,400 feet. Though a little disappointed at not being able to establish Camp V, they returned to Labuje next morning for a well-deserved rest. Ang Temba and Jungalwala had gone with a small party to take over the work where No. III Party had left off.

The momentum of our advance during the first ten days after reaching the Base Camp was spectacular. In their eagerness to get on, Parties I, II and III had moved very fast and we had very nearly reached Camp V. Our forward elements had also taken an unduly large number of Sherpas to support them in maintaining the momentum of advance. In this process our resources in manpower were stretched to the maximum. I felt that it was essential to make a systematic plan for stocking up our Advance Base Camp (Camp III) with tents, food, oxygen and other technical equipment before we forged further ahead.

The ferry plan was divided into two main phases. The first phase consisted of shifting nearly two tons of stores from the Base Camp to the Advance Base Camp. The second, which had to overlap the first to a certain extent, entailed lifting a load of three quarters of a ton from the Advance Base Camp to the camps beyond. Keki Bunshah and Grewal were made responsible for the first phase of the ferry plan.

After staying two nights at Camp II and leaving Misra behind to implement the ferry plan, I left for the Advance Base Camp with Da Namgyal and Kohli. I learnt that Gopal, the photographer, was going back because he had trouble with his throat.

Jungalwala, Bhagwanani and Rajendra Vikram were at Camp III when we arrived there. They told us that the wind had been very strong at Lhotse Face.

I could see from the driven snow and white plumes from the peaks above that the wind was very strong beyond 22,000 feet. We could see Camp IV and Jungalwala pointed out the route to Camp V.



I cannot imagine any place less suitable to choose than the high mountains, wherein to display the mastery of mankind.

— JULIUS KUGY

12

Second Big Hurdle—Lhotse Face

The Advance Base Camp was situated at the far end of the Cwm and from there it looked a comparatively easy walk to Camp IV, which was located in the lower regions of the Lhotse glacier. It was clear that on reaching Camp IV the climber would find himself enclosed by steep faces on three sides. Barring the advance was the great Lhotse feature, difficult enough to try out the endurance, technical skill and determination of the most experienced climbers. This obstacle had to be overcome before the broad depression between Lhotse and Everest, called the South Col, could be reached.

Earlier expeditions had also found that, in addition to the problems of hard work and technique, two other factors made progress agonisingly slow over this stretch. The first was the effect of the altitude which started to tell on the climbers and Sherpas alike; and the other was the strong south-westerly winds of over 50 to 60 miles per hour which kept blowing relentlessly over the Lhotse Face most of the time. The Lhotse feature with its rocky, black, turretted tops had hardly any snow on its upper reaches. Lower down, the glacier descended to the right half of the Face and poured into the Western Cwm, described by Sir John Hunt as the "Glaciated Slope".

On the left half of the Lhotse Face runs a rocky ridge called the 'Geneva Spur' from the South Col diagonally to the right in the direction of the Western Cwm. The name was given to this ridge by the 1952 Swiss expedition most of whose members were from Geneva, and in which Tenzing and Lambert made a heroic attempt on Everest and climbed up to just over 28,000 feet.

The famous Yellow Band which has also been mentioned as a very prominent landmark both by Hunt and Eggler in their books, con-

sisted of limestone slabs and skirted across the Face from the lower end of the Geneva Spur rising to the right until it reached the Lhotse glacier where it disappeared. The Yellow Band appeared again to the right of the Lhotse glacier and continued to stretch across the Nuptse wall.

Various routes from the Cwm to the South Col were explored by different expeditions, but the most practical, particularly for the loaded Sherpas, was along the Lhotse glacier part of the way, and then to the left across the Yellow Band on a contour towards the Geneva Spur. The route then ran straight up the slope until it reached a point slightly higher than the South Col. This alignment took the climber along vertical walls on the Lhotse glacier and later over the glassy hard ice of Lhotse Face. Owing to a mild winter, practically the whole Face was devoid of any snow, and we experienced a granite hard surface with a bluish tinge. The climbers had to spend days cutting steps, perched precariously on the dangerous slopes.

Kohli and Da Namgyal returned to the Base Camp on the 30th evening. Kohli looked a little tired and Da Namgyal had severe stomach trouble. He had been working in cold and fierce winds on the Lhotse Face, and unfortunately fell victim to the ill effects of wind chill and anoxia. He had, however, succeeded in establishing Camp V on April 28, and had put up a Meade tent on a fairly safe platform which he had to carve out of the ice.

Those who had to do intense physical exertion like cutting steps at 23,000 to 24,000 feet without oxygen were the worst affected. Extreme cold and chilling winds also claimed their own victims. Accordingly, after April 20, the Base Camp started receiving casualties of minor cold effects and other ailments caused by the lack of oxygen. While two or three patients, on suffering from a mild frost-bite and Da Namgyal, who had intestinal trouble, were slow to recover, most of the people returned to normal health in two or three days after reaching the Base Camp.

In reaching Camp V the climbers had shown remarkable enthusiasm, energy and determination. They had shown excellent ice-craft in cutting steps along the first half of the Lhotse Face and fixing rope

lines. But beyond Camp V we had to negotiate a steep traverse and a slippery couloir or ice-gully to reach the Yellow Band. After this, the approach to the top of the Geneva Spur appeared to be easy, provided snow conditions were good, but it was difficult to assess the exact nature of the terrain from the Western Cwm. Our fittest climbers and Sherpas had discovered that the slightest adverse weather conditions and the smallest obstacle at that altitude posed severe problems. It was, however, essential to open the route to the South Col. At the same time, I was anxious not to tire my summitters as well as their supporting Sherpas. So decisions regarding the deployment of man-power became very difficult.

I utilised my forced stay at the Base Camp for making the programme for shifting the stores and equipment to the higher camps. Sonam Girmi, the assistant Sardar, with twelve Sherpas was to go to Camp II. We had worked out a schedule for moving all stores from Camp II to Camp III in three days, and then Sonam Girmi and the Sherpas would move up to Camp III. They hoped to shift all the loads required for Camps IV, V and VI and finally Camp VII, from the Advance Base Camp to Camp IV in the next three or four days. We hoped that by then the route to the South Col would have been opened.

The weather generally continued to be fair and I asked Keki and Rajendra Vikram to move up to the Advance Base Camp on the 7th morning to be in charge of the high ferries and the oxygen. The doctor promised to let me go up on the 8th.

I postponed my departure to the Advance Base Camp because I had not yet had any definite news about the South Col. I also wanted to get the weekly weather forecast which was promised two or three days later. The wind was still very strong higher up.

On May 8, 'Chow', Vohra and Grewal returned to the Base Camp with the story of their attempt to reach the South Col.

The western disturbance having passed the Everest area, the wind velocity on May 9, was expected to be 40 to 45 miles per hour at 25,000 feet as against 60 to 65 miles per hour, which we had so far experienced. That afternoon we received a wireless message from Camp II.

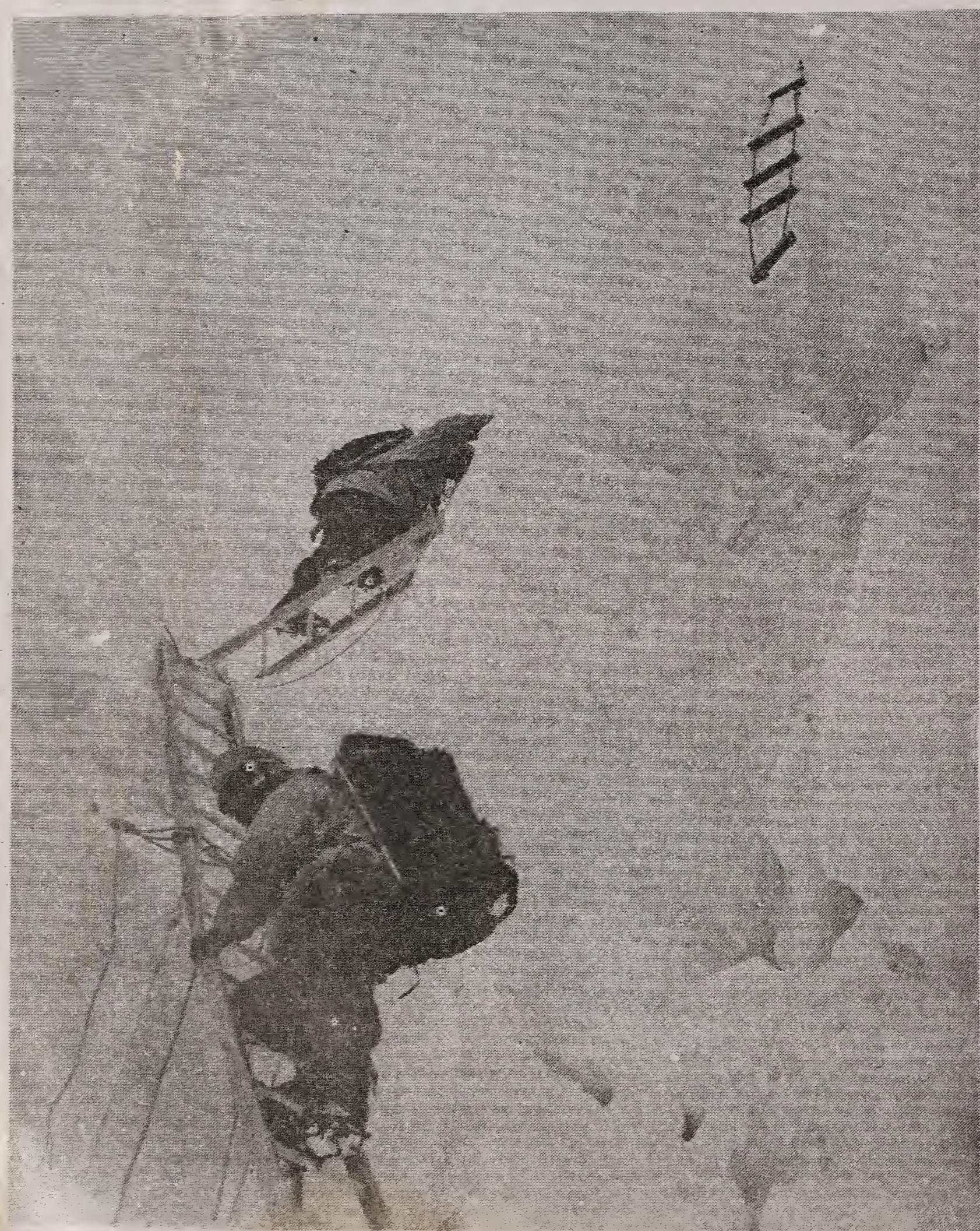


Winding the way through the ice-fall.

Camp III to Camp IV with the Lhotse Face clearly visible in the far distance



A difficult section of the giant crevasse below Camp II



A ferry winding its way through the maze of the ice-fall





Two members of the summit party fixing oxygen masks at Camp VII

to say that Ang Temba and Jungalwala with five Sherpas were seen very near the top of the Geneva Spur.

Tuesday May 10, 1960 dawned bright and sunny, a beautiful morning. The daily weather forecast indicated a wind velocity of 40 to 50 miles per hour at 30,000 feet. Otherwise the weather was expected to be fair to cloudy, with chances of a snow-shower during the evening or night. We also received the much awaited weekly forecast which read: "Trough in westerlies now over west Persian Gulf, may affect weather Everest region towards middle of week. (Westerly wind may weaken temporarily about middle of week, but monsoon lull unlikely during week".



The South Col had been reached on May 9. The Swiss had reached this important landmark also on the same date in 1956. Ang Temba and Jungalwala who returned to the Base Camp with nine Sherpas told us the story of their remarkable feat of endurance. They had left the Base Camp on the 7th afternoon and after sleeping the night at Camp IV they reached Camp V on May 8, where they stayed for the night.

Ang Temba brought back with him a small black leather-bound diary. From the name and address in the diary we found that it

belonged to Doctor Hans Grimm, a member of the 1956 Swiss expedition. Inside the diary was a photograph of an attractive young girl about 13 or 14 years old and two currency notes, one of 100 Swiss Francs and the other of 100 Lire. The last entry in the diary was dated May 18, but as it was in German we could not make out what Doctor Grimm had written.

The obstacles of the Lhotse Face had been surmounted and the time had come to build up the last take-off position and draw up the final plan. Our prayers for being spared strong winds during the ascent to the peak had to be redoubled now.

That evening I had to make a difficult decision about Da Namgyal. Since his return from the Lhotse Face a week ago he had been resting and was under treatment. He still had a pain in the stomach, and was quite weak. I did not think he would pick up sufficient strength to be able to join the summit team. It made me very sad to have to tell Da Namgyal that he would have to remain behind on account of his health. Quiet, modest and undemonstrative, Da Namgyal showed no emotion on his face. His exclusion was, however, a bit of a blow to me also. In technique, discretion and experience he was head and shoulders above anyone in the team and inspired confidence in everyone.

That night there was great jubilation in the Base Camp. Both Jungalwala and Ang Témba looked remarkably fit in spite of the very arduous climbs they had done. The big Mess tent was overcrowded at dinner time and a number of members were hurriedly scribbling letters as the mail runner was due to leave early next morning. The loud voice of Jungalwala could be heard over the din, as he spun his yarns. Everyone was greatly interested in the photograph of Miss Grimm which had been lying for four years at the South Col. Miss Grimm must be quite a girl now!

पतितोऽपि कराधातैरुत्पत्त्येव कन्दुकः।
प्रायेण साधुवृत्तानामस्थायिन्यो विपत्तयः॥

Though beat down by the hand, the ball springs up again; the right men have mishaps only for a while.

— BHARTRIHARI

13

The Dreaded South Col

Sonam, 'Chow', Kohli, Gopal and my Sherpa *sathi* Lakpa accompanied me to the Advance Base Camp on May 11. The ice-fall had changed a lot at many places and in some sections it could hardly be recognised. While stretches of ice had either sagged or crumbled or avalanched, many seracs had tumbled down throwing varying sized ice-blocks across our path. We had to alter the route from time to time to meet the changing situation, and we knew that this process would continue until we made the final attempt and the last man had come off the ice-fall. We could only pray that at the time of the upheaval, avalanche, or sinking or falling of ice, there would be no sherpa or climber in the area.

We reached Camp II fairly early in the afternoon. Nanda had spent four days in Camps II and III laying telephone cables between the two Camps. This was perhaps the highest successful telephone link ever established. On arrival at Camp III, I talked on the telephone to Rajendra Vikram. He gave me the latest news and informed me that Keki and Misra had gone to Camp IV. I had been told by the doctor that Keki should be advised not to go beyond Camp IV. Rajendra Vikram promised to convey the message to Keki on the wireless set which he did, but apparently the message was not understood by Keki or he gave it the 'blind eye', and went to Camp V the next day.

That evening after dinner, we listened to the news and music on the small transistor set, when one of us noticed the moon rising slowly behind the Lhotse feature. At first it was a thin arc but very soon we could see the moon move visibly to the right of Lhotse. We felt as if we

were standing silently in the dark inside a cathedral and someone was coming up from behind the organ holding a candle. As the moon was clear of Lhotse's turrets, its first rays fell on Everest which appeared to emerge from the darkness quite unnoticed. There it stood majestically to our left, looking down into the valley—stolid, silent and challenging.

That night as I lay in my cosy sleeping bag I started thinking of various things. There were about eight or ten of us, including the Sherpas, in four tents on the lip of a gaping bergschrund, each man with his own ambition, his own hopes and his own problems, and each one of us mentally living in his own world and feeling important in his own way. Yet, how insignificant we were, lying under the shadow of giants like Nuptse, Lhotse and Everest. I remember Jun galwala arguing with someone and saying that the mountains had a way of 'sorting everyone out'.

We left Camp II fairly late next day because we had to take stock of the stores and equipment at the Camp. The weather throughout the march from Camp II was quite good, but after we reached the Advance Base Camp it started snowing. I was anxious to find out the exact position regarding the stocking-up of the various Camps, but I could not get a clear appreciation of the situation. Kohli, Kumar and Keki were, therefore, detailed to go into the plan once again and to discuss it with me the next day. By the evening, however, I discovered that quite a number of loads of rations and fuel had been sent up, but instead of dumping the loads at higher camps and returning to the Advance Base Camp or even the lower camps, large parties had been permitted to stay at Camps IV and V, and they had eaten up the rations and consumed the fuel which they had carried.

On the evening of May 12, we received the unwelcome news on the radio that the monsoon had reached the Laccadive Islands and was approaching fast towards Colombo. On the 13th morning I drafted an urgent message to Mr. Sarin in Delhi to find out from the Meteorological Department the exact position of the monsoon and when it was expected to reach the Everest region. There was not much time to lose if the monsoon had already been sighted over the Indian Ocean.

A small ferry party had gone from Camp V to the South Col the previous evening. They were somewhat slow in climbing and could not return to Camp V the same day. They had to bivouac between Camp V and the South Col, but were able to return safely the next day. There were, however, a couple of cases of chilblains and minor frostbite of the ears among the members of the party.

I discussed the ferry plan and suggested some modifications. The situation was still fluid because I had not yet made out my final ascent plan. Since time was to be an important factor in the plan and we did not know exactly when the ascent could be made, it was not possible to go on any definite figures. However, I decided that Camps V and VI should be stocked up with oxygen, tentage and fuel.

Although the weather was not very favourable, Kumar and Kohli were asked to go up to Camp V the next day and escort ferries up to the South Col. I was particularly anxious to get Kumar used to the higher altitudes because his last trip to Camp V was not a very happy one. They were told to make use of oxygen. They were also told to find out the exact state of the oxygen cylinders left at the South Col by the Swiss expedition.

They reached Camp V the same afternoon and reported on the transistor wireless set that they were taking the altitude very well and did not have to use oxygen either during their climb to Camp V or at Camp V itself. On the evening of May 13. I received the following message from Mr. Sarin:

“Your Exp/252 of today. I could not give an immediate answer as asked for because of necessity of reference to Poona Met. office. Position is that in association with deep depression in the Arabian Sea south-west monsoon current has extended into east Arabian Sea south of latitude twelve degrees north. Expect advance of monsoon in the Arabian Sea will not be maintained after disappearance of the Arabian Sea depression. Monsoon so far not advanced into Bay of Bengal. See no indication of monsoon reaching Everest within next week. I understand under normal conditions unlikely repeat unlikely monsoon reach Everest region till beginning of June.”

But there was no mention of the lull yet and on the 14th afternoon the weather deteriorated; by the evening it was snowing heavily. It snowed and thundered practically the whole night. We were all very anxious about the party at Camp V. When we got up the next morning the whole Cwm appeared to have put on a new white cloak, and there was fresh, clean snow many inches thick covering practically every rock feature. The black patches on Lhotse also became white, and the Everest massif, which is normally black, also wore a white garb. Lhotse Face became dangerous on account of avalanche hazards on its steep slope.

Later in the morning we saw Kumar and Kohli starting for the South Col. It was not a good day to go up and I wished they had stayed on at Camp V. They must have found the going very heavy because a couple of hours later they were seen returning to Camp V. When we established contact with Camp V, I asked Kumar and Kohli to return to the Advance Base Camp with all the Sherpas because there was a likelihood of more snow and it would not be right to stay on Lhotse Face in that condition of the snow. While checking up the rations and stores at the Advance Base Camp we discovered that not only did we not have enough stocks at the higher camps, but the ration and fuel position at Camp III was getting serious. We sent an urgent message to the Base Camp with a returning ferry asking them to send up fresh stocks.

On the afternoon of the 15th Jungalwala and Da Namgyal arrived from the Base Camp. We were quite a big congregation at Camp III now. In view of the uncertain weather no useful work could be done by anyone, and, in the meantime we were making serious dents in our rations at the Camp.

All this time the weather continued to be unkind. When was the lull coming? After considerable thought I had to take the painful decision of thinning out Camp III and sending as many people as possible down to the Base Camp. Gopal, who could not, in any case, take pictures on account of poor visibility, and Rajendra Vikram, together with a party of Sherpas, were asked to return to the Base Camp the next morning. A message was also passed not to send up anyone from the Base Camp to Camp III.

We still had a lot to do in the Cwm as well as on Lhotse Face. The track from Camp II to Camp IV had to be retraced because the strong wind had blown away most of the marker flags. Kumar and Kohli reported that conditions on Lhotse Face were bad, as, in addition to obliterating the steps, the snow had actually buried the fixed lines almost throughout their length.

A couple of days after my arrival at the Advance Base Camp, I started running a temperature and had a stomach upset. The doctor diagnosed this as an infection I must have caught at the Base Camp. After a day's treatment, however, my temperature came down to normal, but my stomach disorder continued. As I had lost my appetite, I started getting weaker. The doctor said it was some intestinal trouble and suggested I should go down to the Base Camp. This was out of question at the time, because certain crucial decisions had to be made and my place was at the Advance Base Camp. In fact, I had come to the Camp to go to the South Col to support the summit teams. My condition, however, started deteriorating. On May 16, Bhagwanani said that I must go back to the Base Camp. There was no other way to recover from the illness. Although I became very weak my head was quite clear and I could carry out the normal planning work. I, therefore, decided to stay on as long as I could. Although Da Namgyal had improved and had actually arrived at the Advance Base Camp, he did not appear to be in a fit condition to be sent to the South Col. I had, therefore, to find someone else to be in charge of the supporting party at the South Col.

I decided that all members who were marking time at Camp III for good weather should reopen the route to Camp IV by ferrying essential loads up to the Camp. Sonam and Gombu were asked to go to Camp V and shift it a little higher to reduce the distance between that Camp and the South Col, so that the parties going from Camp V to VI could return to Camp V the same day.

The Sherpas who had been employed on higher ferries were asked to return to the Base Camp for rest to enable them to go up later in support of the summit teams. One party had left early in the morning. Gopal and Rajendra Vikram left after breakfast and a second party of Sherpas led by Gyalzen, a senior Sherpa, was to leave last. When

Gyalzen came to say goodbye, I asked him to wait for three to four minutes. When he had waited for half an hour, he started becoming impatient. I said goodbye to him and gave him a letter for the Base Camp. Gyalzen's party had not gone ten minutes when we heard a thunderous clatter starting from the western shoulder of Everest. We came out quickly and saw that a very large mass of over-hanging ice had broken off the shoulder and had hurtled down across the whole of the Cwm with the speed of an express train. Big, ugly looking pieces of the ice clattered down with a frightening noise, dissolving into powdered snow-dust which rose from the surface in the form of white clouds. The avalanche travelled from one side of the Cwm to the other up to Nuptse wall. It was a frightening spectacle. Our thoughts went back to the parties which had left for Camp II. I ran back to the tent and contacted Camp II on the telephone. I was not quite sure if the line would still be working after the great devastation caused by the avalanche, but the cable had been buried deep under the avalanche, and I was able to make contact. A Sherpa who answered the telephone informed me that the first party had already arrived there. Bhagwanani said that he was able to see through the binoculars all members of the second and third parties silhouetted against the white cloud. We heaved a sigh of relief to learn that all members had escaped great disaster. That afternoon Gyalzen rang me up from Camp II and thanked me for delaying him because he felt that if he had gone earlier he might have been buried under the avalanche.

On May 17, when the doctor examined me, he was quite firm. He told me that I must go down. I was slightly hesitant but on account of my growing weakness I planned to leave on May 18. Another detailed report on the weather forecast with regard to the advance of the monsoon was expected any day. The daily weather report made no mention of it, but reported occasional snow-showers in the Everest area.

Before going down, I had to make the final decision about the summit teams. So I called a meeting of all the members that afternoon. I recalled a similar scene described in Hunt's book when he announced his summit team. There was an air of suspense because I

had not discussed the team with anyone till then. Although Da Namgyal had come up to the Advance Base Camp I had decided to leave him out of the summit teams. Initially, it was my intention to send three teams, but with Da Namgyal dropped out, I had to be content with only two. Unlike the previous two successful expeditions to Everest in which each team consisted of two persons I decided to send up three men to each team. The first team consisted of Gombu, Sonam Gyatso and Kumar. Ang Temba, Kohli and Vohra were to follow a day later as the second team.

At that stage, I could only announce the composition of the two parties; it was not possible to fix the date for the ascent. While the second party was told to be in a supporting role for the first in case of need, Jungalwala was selected to be in charge of the base at the South Col. I also made it clear to Ang Temba, Kohli and Vohra that in case there were not enough supplies or oxygen at Camp VI and beyond, the second attempt would be called off and only Vohra would stay with Jungalwala till the first summit team had returned safely. All of us were sorry for Da Namgyal who had to be left out, but I had already discussed this with him, and he was convinced that it was best for him not to go. However, as I was going down to the Base Camp, I asked him to act as an adviser to the summit teams and to act on my behalf while they prepared at the Advance Base Camp.

All members of the team, except Gombu and Sonam who had to shift Camp V, were told to go down to the Base Camp for rest. It was planned that if we did not receive a definite indication of the lull within three days, the climbers would come up to the Advance Base Camp and start for the South Col as soon as the weather permitted. Kumar, Vohra and Kohli left with Misra and Lakpa a little later. Although I did not think it was necessary, Bhagwanani insisted on going down to Camp II with us in case I needed some medical attention. Before leaving Camp II for the Base Camp next day morning I rang up the Advance Base Camp and left a message for Gombu and Sonam to come down to the Base Camp for rest as soon as they had finished their work on the Lhotse Face.

Keki and 'Chow' had gone to Camp IV with a ferry earlier and had carried some loads themselves. But the doctor advised me that Keki

too should go down because he did not look too well. In any case, ferries to the higher camps were no longer possible on account of the bad weather and I had to withdraw a large number of men from the Western Cwm. By the time the exodus finished, there were only about six or eight persons left in Camps II and III, including Da Namgyal, 'Chow' and Bhagwanani.

The weather was still bad and it kept snowing all the way down to Camp II. It was not an ideal day to be on the mountain at all, leave alone going down the ice-fall. Normally I used to be the last one on the rope when going down. This time Misra and Lakpa insisted that I should remain in the middle with Lakpa leading and Misra following me, watching almost every step I took. We had a long journey ahead and I had already been told that the ice-fall had deteriorated. There were more than a hundred obstacles of varied nature, some technically difficult, others quite dangerous; but all of them requiring good nerves and perfect balance. The journey over the ice-fall is exhausting under the best conditions, but I was very weak, the weather was bad and visibility was very poor. As we started, it began to snow heavily again. I had made up my mind not to give any impression of my personal misgivings to my companions, and pulling myself up I waved a cheery goodbye to the doctor, Da Namgyal and Jungalwala.

For the first two hundred yards from Camp II, we had to traverse over flat terrain, and I found the going very tiring and heavy. Perhaps it was because of the fresh snow. Our first obstacle was a descent down a vertical wall below which there was a fathomless crevasse. This obstacle was made quite secure by fixed rope lines, but to negotiate it we had to take two steps down the vertical wall and then step across the gap to an ice-tower, which also had steps cut down its vertical face. The gap was too wide for a comfortable crossing. We had, therefore, to make ourselves secure and balance for some time before using the rope to pull ourselves across to the far side. On the ice-tower we had to hug the face with the help of the rope and go down carefully on to a narrow ice-ridge which also had dangerous looking crevasses on either side. I had gone over this stretch many times and had never thought of it as a difficult one. But it required more strength than I had to heave across on this occasion. However, I

consoled myself with the thought that on previous occasions I had carried a very heavy rucksack, but this time I had hardly any load, and also that I had less body-weight to heave. I took the descent in my stride, pretending that I was normal, and surprised myself and my companions by the ease with which I crossed it. Misra and Lakpa seemed happy to find that after all I was not in such a bad state. All the same, both had belayed me very well indeed and in fact were quite prepared to lower me, if necessary, like a sack of potatoes.

My performance over this obstacle renewed my confidence. However, I was surprised to see that soon I found the going heavy again. I was not quite sure if this was due to heavy snow conditions or my weakness. I asked Lakpa and Misra if they found the going difficult and they assured me that the snow was heavy. Slowly and steadily we plodded along until we came to another ice-wall down which we had to use a rope ladder. We descended a forty-foot ice-wall on the rope ladder and the other half along a very steep and tricky traverse, holding precariously to a fixed rope line. After we had got over this hurdle, I discovered that I seemed to be able to do the difficult portions more easily than the flat bits. Lakpa remarked that our journey would have been much quicker if the whole ice-fall consisted of crevasses, ice-walls, steep traverses and ladders.

We had been on the move more than three hours and were still about four hundred feet from the foot of the ice-fall. Lakpa and Misra had been very good companions and insisted on more halts than I would have liked to allow. Our progress therefore was very slow. We had left most of the difficult obstacles behind when I noticed that Lakpa had jumped a small crevasse. I looked back at Misra to make sure that there was enough slack on the rope before I jumped, but when I came near the crevasse and was about to jump, I could not understand why Lakpa need have jumped at all. The two lips of the crevasse were joined by what looked like a firm snow bridge on which there was a clear foot print of someone who had crossed it by stepping on it. I was in no condition or mood to want to jump over crevasses unnecessarily and thought that Lakpa's act of leaping over was a bit of showing off. So I nonchalantly stepped on the snow bridge, which collapsed as soon as my weight fell on it. My heart sank

as I felt myself going down into the crevasse. But my companions were alert; Misra saw me going down and even Lakpa sensed that something was wrong and both acted in a flash and belayed me firmly. I dangled for a few seconds in the dark abyss before I was heaved up unceremoniously by Lakpa and Misra on to firm ice. In the process of being pulled out, my body dislodged some icicles or frozen snow which I could hear going down into the crevasse, bumping from side to side making a tinkling sound like falling glass, which sounded farther and farther away for several seconds, indicating the depth of the icy grave from which I had just been rescued.

After resting for a while, we went down slowly and were met by Dr. Das and others. Das gave me a thorough check-up and declared that I was badly dehydrated. He seemed to have anticipated the cause of my illness and had decided upon the treatment even before I came. Within minutes of my arrival, he, along with 'Khalifa' and Kumar, contrived to hang a bottle of glucose from the pole of my tent to give me a pint of the fluid through an intravenous injection by the 'drip method'. He assured me that I would be fighting fit the next day. He shifted to my tent to keep an eye on me. I was obviously suffering from acute dehydration because after Das had injected two or three bottles of the glucose into my system, I started feeling better.

On May 19, the weather took a turn for the worse. It had snowed heavily the night before and even at the Base Camp there was about three inches of fresh snow on the surface. There was also a strong wind blowing. I had asked for a whole week's forecast, particularly with reference to the approach of the monsoon and the possibility of a lull, but it had not yet been received. Rao made the inference from the daily broadcast that the monsoon would perhaps hit the Everest region in seven or eight days. This made us all very anxious because we wanted at least five days from Camp III to make an attempt on the peak and return to Camp III. We did not know when we could start because it was still snowing. However, Rao felt that we should get a break in the weather in the very near future. So, in spite of the indifferent conditions, I sent all members of the summit teams who were at the Base Camp to Camp III.

Gombu, Sonam, Jungalwala and Ang Temba were already at

Camp III. Kumar, Kohli and Vohra came to say goodbye to me. I briefed them fully once again about the plan and stressed the need for checking up the oxygen equipment very thoroughly before they left for the final ascent. In fact, they were to make it a habit to check the apparatus every time they moved in and out of the Camp. I requested Kumar to take with him a brass image given by my wife and a small woollen scarf which my second son wanted taken to the top of Everest. They left full of confidence and hope.

Kohli and Kumar wanted to reach Camp III the same day. Both were good climbers and were fit and could have done the journey quite easily, but when they reached the large bergschrund before Camp II, they found that the bridges on a couple of crevasses had collapsed and a whole belt of ice had sagged more than fifty feet. The ice-fall had changed so much that they could not even make out where the route was, and were confronted by a steep ice-wall. It took Kohli and Kumar four hours to make a fresh route. With their climbing proficiency they could have gone across quickly, but they had to make the route secure for the loaded Sherpas. Having been held up by this unexpected hurdle, they reached Camp II late in the evening and were not able to go to Camp III.

Nanda also came to see me a little after Kumar and Kohli had left. I had asked him to go up to Camp II to ensure communication between the Base Camp and the higher camps. Sohan Singh, who had not climbed very high on the mountain yet, accompanied him. Despite his age, Sohan had the will and ambition to climb. However, I advised him not to strain himself too much.

Before he left for Camp II, Nanda had arranged with the signallers to send out daily broadcasts on our bigger wireless transmitter for the benefit of the higher camps. I had particularly asked for this so that I could transmit my instructions which could be picked up on ordinary radio receivers of which there were two at the higher camps. This was, however, only a one-way traffic. The climbers at the higher Camps could not have talked back to the Base Camp.

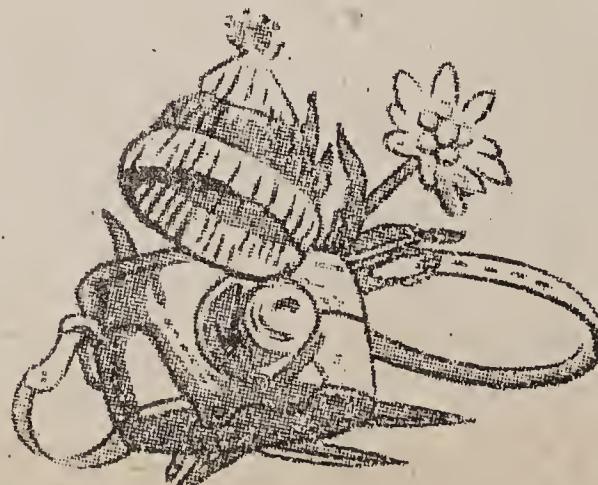
The weather cleared up later on the 20th morning and it was bright and sunny in the whole region. That evening Keki came down from

the Advance Base Camp under medical advice. He was relieved to find that I had established a powerful wireless link to communicate with Da Namgyal. Keki looked very weak and pulled down, but he was quite cheerful.

On the 21st morning, I received the overall weather forecast for the week. According to it, the monsoon was not due in the Everest area till June 2. Although, knowing the local conditions, Rao was a little sceptical about the forecast. We were greatly heartened by this welcome news.

I sent Misra and a party of Sherpas to carry out repairs on the route on the ice-fall. Grewal went with him to join Nanda at Camp II. My *sathi*, Lakpa, was an experienced Sherpa and I sent him also to support the summit teams.

At ten o'clock that morning, I sent my first personal message to all climbers and Sherpas of the summit teams. In this message I gave complete movement plans for the summit parties. Jungalwala and Da Namgyal were given clear instructions that they should not stay at the South Col more than two nights. I impressed on the members of the summit teams that their lives depended on oxygen and that they should not treat the apparatus lightly. Da Namgyal at Camp III and Nanda at Camp II were to work out the withdrawal plan as well. I also gave them the hopeful news that the monsoon was not expected until 2nd June. I ended the message with these words: "I am sorry I am not with you, but in my thoughts and prayers. I shall be with you every step you take towards the summit. May God be with you and bring you back successful and safe."



May our five senses be pure, and may the weather on the honourable mountain be fine.

— JAPANESE PILGRIMS' MOTTO

14

The Final Attempt

After a heavy snowfall the steeper slopes have to be avoided for the first two or three days. Therefore, although it had stopped snowing on the 20th I had given instructions that the first party should not start till May 22, and in order to save a day, they should go straight to Camp V. They were also told to use oxygen from Camp IV onwards.

The story of the five days commencing on the 22nd is best told by Kumar and Kohli. For May 22, Kumar had written in his diary:

“At last the ‘D’ day, May 22, has come. There was great excitement in Camp III as we got ready to move, checking up oxygen masks, first-aid kits, cameras, spare films and numerous other items of equipment. We took with us a dozen boiled eggs, some *thupka*, Sonam’s special pickles and *chutney*, one pound each of dried mutton and *gur* (unrefined sugar). Just before we left we switched on the radio for the Leader’s message. His voice came through loud and clear as he said: ‘For all the members from the Leader. I would like to repeat the message from the Sponsoring Committee sent to you when we started from Jaynagar, which is, ‘Not only we, not only your relations and friends, but all India is watching your progress with interest’. Secondly, have you checked your gas masks, oxygen cylinders and other personal equipment? Have you taken spare sets of bladders, tubes and valves and masks? Have you taken matches with you...?’

The Leader reminded us practically of every item of equipment. Then he passed a message to all high-altitude Sherpas which said, ‘Remember your promise to Tenzing to do your

best. It is your expedition. Do not let the parties be delayed. You must carry full loads up to the South Col and Camp VII. You have carried 45 to 50 lbs. for other expeditions. We are counting on you as I am sure you will do your best. May God bless you.'

Representing the Leader, Da Namgyal ceremoniously and with decorum handed over the flags—the Indian tricolour, the flag of Nepal, and the expedition's pennant. Kohli gave me the Naval ensign. I already had my Kumaon Regimental flag with me. Sonam was carrying a yellow silken flag specially presented to him by the Dalai Lama with prayers written on it in Tibetan. Gombu carried the Ceremonial scarf given by Tenzing and some other articles of sentimental value. Amidst cries of good luck and its Sherpa version, *Tashi Dela*, Gombu, Sonam and I left with nine of the finest high-altitude Sherpas. These cheerful, strapping young Sherpas were as excited as we were. Bhagwanani followed us after some time to station himself at Camp V for medical assistance, if required.

It was a very bright, sunny day and on the snow we found it very hot. Our rucksacks weighed a little over 30 lbs., but the Sherpas carried a full load of nearly 50 lbs. We had all dressed up in our woollen clothes, but as we plodded slowly through the heavy snow we felt very hot and had to take off some of our clothes. It was so hot that Sonam was wearing only a cotton vest almost throughout the march. From Camp IV to Camp V we used oxygen at two litres per minute and found the climb very much easier. During our journey we saw the sites of many small avalanches which had come down on Lhotse Face.

We arrived at the old site of Camp V at about 4.30 in the afternoon, feeling remarkably fit. We decided to camp here as we knew there was not enough level ground for all our tents at the new site of Camp V. Here we also dug up nine oxygen cylinders out of the snow. Before taking them up we had to check up the pressure with the help of the manometer. All of a sudden there was a noise like a gun shot and I saw the manome-

ter whizzing past my leg like a bullet. Sonam who was checking up the pressure in a cylinder apparently hadn't tightened the manometer properly. The expression on his face was something to see.

It was a perfectly calm evening. There was no wind or snow and Everest did not have its usual plume of driven snow, which showed that the wind velocity was low even at higher altitudes. The sunset was beautiful and we admired the lovely view. Sonam pointed out Cho-Oyu and talked about his expedition in 1958. Pumori looked particularly beautiful from the Camp. After seeing the sunset behind Cho-Oyu throwing golden beams across the sky, we went inside our tents. Before sleeping we made some soup and warmed the rice preparation Sonam had brought and ate it with chillies followed by lime-juice. Our supper tasted delicious."

At the Base Camp we had received news about the progress of the first party. On the morning of the 23rd, I broadcast to the members a message from the President of India. The message read: "We are all following your ascent to the world's highest peak with great interest. I wish and pray that your adventure may be crowned with full success."

That morning we received a report from Nanda that the first party had left Camp V for the South Col. The withdrawal of equipment and stores no longer required had already started. In the morning the weather was clear, but a little later low clouds began rising up from the valley, but Rao explained to me that the clouds were not likely to bring bad weather. So in that morning's message I commented on the weather, in case the climbers higher up also had doubts about the clouds. I said: "The weather is in our favour. The low-lying clouds that you might have seen this morning are no more than local night fog. It will not snow, nor will the clouds bring bad weather. In fact, they are your friends and will act as your umbrella, protecting you from the scorching sun." Kumar wrote in his diary:

"By the time we finished our breakfast and prepared to leave, it was 7.30 and the sun had come over the top of Lhotse and hit our camp. We put on our oxygen masks and switched on the supply at two litres per minute. The Sherpas were very heavily

loaded now as they had to carry some extra loads from the camp. Sonam, Gombu and I carried two cylinders each in addition to our rucksacks, making a total load of over 50 lbs.

Half an hour later, we reached the new Camp V where Jungalwala and Chowdhury had arrived the night before. Jungalwala had seven Sherpas who were carrying loads to the South Col. He had sent two Sherpas in advance without loads to clear the track and the fixed rope lines which were buried under the snow.

Chowdhury stayed behind at Camp V and we all resumed our journey at 9.30 a.m.. The Sherpas had done a good job improving the route and we found no difficulty in crossing the big couloir soon after we left Camp V. It took us nearly an hour to get to the Yellow Band where we rested for some time. While we were resting, Gombu seemed to be looking for something in the rocks. A couple of minutes later he returned with a pair of binoculars, a piton hammer and some pitons which he had left behind during his previous visit to the Lhotse Face.

After the Yellow Band we started going up a steep slope of mixed ice and snow. An hour's climb brought us to the upper slopes of the Geneva Spur and we continued our climb on rock. About twenty yards away from our route we saw the small winch which had been put up by the Swiss expedition in 1956 and three empty oxygen cylinders. After reaching the top of the Geneva Spur at 2 p.m. we went slowly down to the broad saddle of the South Col. During the downhill journey we switched off the oxygen supply. The saddle was littered with the junk abandoned by the previous expeditions. There were oxygen cylinders, gas masks, some empty containers of food, tattered tents, tent poles, old air mattresses and Butane gas cylinders.

At 2.30 p.m. we sent Jungalwala's Sherpas back to Camp V because they had a long journey in front of them. By now a strong wind had started blowing and it took us two hours to put up one French and one Meade tent. Jungalwala arrived with our Sherpas and they put up another French tent. We hopefully

checked up the thirteen French oxygen cylinders of the Swiss expedition which were stacked in a row, but to our disappointment found that they were empty. Then we took stock of our own oxygen cylinders. We had twenty-seven which were enough for the first summit party to carry out its task. We spent the afternoon taking movie and still photographs and checking up our stores and equipment. Jungalwala and I checked up the pressure of all our oxygen cylinders and prepared the loads for Camp VII, which included one assault Meade tent, three sleeping bags, two air mattresses, two Bluet gas burners with eight refills, some *sampa*, tea, sugar, lime-juice powder, powdered soup, chocolates, Sonam's *thupka*, Sonam's and Gombu's *chutney*, matches, biscuits, first-aid kit and twelve oxygen cylinders. The oxygen cylinders to be used by the climbers and the Sherpas for going up to the Camp VII were kept separate. We also had three spare bladders, a few spare valves and regulators, piton hammers and rock pitons. By the time we collected a few more essential items we had seven Sherpa loads.

After a supper consisting of soup, *sampa*, *thupka*, dried mutton, boiled eggs, lime-juice and tea, we went to bed at 9 p.m. The climbers used oxygen at the rate of one litre per minute during the night."

The 24th was a very fine morning. When Kumar's party woke up at 7 a.m., the sun had already been up for nearly two hours. The summit parties of both the British and Swiss expeditions had to carry extra loads to Camp VII because they did not have a sufficient number of high-altitude Sherpas in a fit condition when they reached the South Col. Kumar's party had nine good Sherpas and there were loads for only seven. In fact it became a problem as to which seven to send to Camp VII. The party checked up the equipment once more and after breakfast left at about 10 a.m. with seven Sherpas, Sonam Girmi, Tashi, Pemba Sunder, Da Norbu, Ang Norbu, Phu Dorje, and Ang Nima. In addition to their own rucksacks the summit team carried two oxygen cylinders each and switched on the gas at four litres per minute. The Sherpas also used oxygen from the South Col onwards. When they left, the weather was good and there was hardly any wind.

From the far end of the Col they turned back to wave to Jüngalwala and others at Camp VI and had a lovely view of Makalu, Lhotse and Nuptse.

Kumar has described the climb from the South Col in the following words:

"We recognised the couloir where Charles Evans and Bourdillon had slipped on their return journey after their attempt on May 26, 1953. Instead of going up the couloir we avoided it by climbing a slope to its left. When we reached a point on level with the top end of the couloir, we traversed right on to the south-east ridge. We climbed slowly on the rocks on the ridge and had no difficulty with our oxygen apparatus. Somehow I did not find the climb at all difficult, but then I was having four litres of oxygen per minute which did make it easy. At one in the afternoon, Da Norbu, one of the seven Sherpas, stopped to point out the place where the Swiss expedition of 1956 had put up their Camp VII. We saw the remains of the tent and an oxygen cylinder lying near it. But we continued to climb higher in order to reduce the distance between the peak and Camp VII. After climbing another fifty feet or so Gombu found a site for our tent and we decided to camp there. The height of this place according to the map and the altimeter was 27,600 feet. The Sherpas looked remarkably fit in spite of their arduous climb and heavy loads. They helped us in clearing away the snow and putting up the 'assault' Meade tent.

Having brought everything we wanted to make our ascent to the top, our faithful Sherpas shook hands with each one of us in turn, wished us luck and started on their downhill journey to the South Col, waving to us as they climbed down. We watched them for some time, then turned to make ourselves safe and comfortable. The wind had started to blow by now. Although it was not very strong, Gombu felt it would be wiser to make the tent a little more secure. He cut a piece of nylon rope and anchored the tent by tying the rope to my ice-axe which was buried deep into the snow. At the other end he drove a piton into the rock and tied the tent to it. While Gombu was busy with

the tent, I went inside and melted some snow on our gas stove to prepare some lime-juice. In the meantime, Sonam had started checking up the pressure of oxygen in the cylinders. After some time, he made the alarming announcement that except six bottles, all the others were leaking and that the pressure was very low. On hearing this, I dashed out of the tent upsetting the melted snow in the process. I came outside and examined the manometer which Sonam was using to check the pressure of the gas. I found that the rubber washer was missing from its nozzle. I found the washer lying on the ground which I replaced on the manometer and checked the gas pressure again. We were greatly relieved to find that the oxygen pressure in all the bottles was correct.

After we had checked all our equipment and drunk some lime-juice, we stood outside and took many photographs. We had a lovely view and could see most of the peaks around Everest. Nuptse, Ama Dablam and Tawéche, all of which used to tower above us, were now below us. Lhotse and Makalu did not look very high either. We stood outside talking for a long time. Here we were, three of us. Perhaps on this date no other human beings at any point on this earth were higher than us. The thought gave us a great thrill. We were all feeling very fit and wondered what news we would have for our country the next day at that time. We also thought of all the effort that had gone into placing the three of us at that altitude. Nearly seven hundred porters, more than fifty Sherpas, twenty members and a few others had started from Jaynagar just for this day—to push a team of two or three up to the last camp with our minimum requirements of oxygen, air mattresses, sleeping bags, fuel, food and other essentials. It was up to us now to do our bit and justify the expense, the effort, the hard work put in by hundreds of people, and above all, the trust placed in us by our Leader, the Sponsoring Committee and the nation. We should consider ourselves very lucky indeed and prayed to God to give us the strength to fulfil the mission. The wind was a little strong, but that did not worry us because we had expected some

wind at that altitude. All the same, both Gombu and Sonam remarked that they wished we would have good weather the following day,

At about six in the evening we went inside the tent and had our supper which consisted of soup, some *sampa* and tea. Then we retired for the night. The tent was a bit too small for the three of us but we did not mind. First, we assisted Gombu into his sleeping bag and pushed him to one side of the tent. Then Sonam helped me into my sleeping bag. Finally, when Sonam got in he had nobody to help him and could pull the sleeping bag only up to his thighs. But Sonam had a good eider-down jacket on and decided to do without the sleeping bag covering the top half of his body.

I suggested to my companions that we might take a sleeping pill each in order to sleep comfortably but the idea was rejected by the other two because we wanted to make an early start and did not wish to be under the influence of any drugs which might keep us sleeping late. Lying on the floor of the tent we three resembled the first layer sardines at the bottom of a tin. The slightest movement of one disturbed the others. For some time we talked, and then wished each other goodnight, put on our masks and switched on the oxygen at one-and-a-half litres a minute. Sonam started using one of his half-finished cylinders of oxygen which finished after some time. He was too lazy to get up and bring another bottle and said he could do without oxygen when sleeping; and within seconds he was snoring. We dozed off and on and kept tossing, if such a thing was at all possible inside our sleeping bags, in order to find a more comfortable position. The hours seemed to drag on and the night appeared very long indeed.

We had decided to get up at three in the morning to start at four. We were frequently disturbed by the violent flapping of the tent and the vibrating fabric sounded like a drum in crescendo. I was getting a little anxious about the wind, but at about two o'clock Sonam woke up to look at his watch and

optimistically remarked that the wind would die down in the morning. As time passed I could see no evidence of the wind abating. It was only getting stronger and stronger. This disturbed my sleep quite a lot. Inside the tent our breath had frozen on the ceiling of the tent and there were tiny little icicles just above our faces. Occasionally the warm breath would melt some of the ice and a drop of very cold water would fall on the face."

Now let us see what Kohli has to say about his party on 24 and 25 May:

"When we woke up it was an excellent day, clear and still. We had already checked and rechecked all our equipment many times the night before. However, we went through the ritual again, and after a hearty breakfast bade goodbye to Da Namgyal and the others at the Advance Base Camp. They were all outside and cheered us as we moved away.

We reached Camp IV at 10.30 a.m. and picked up eighteen cylinders of oxygen from there. After resting for some time, we reached the site of old Camp V at 2.30 p.m. The seven Sherpas who were to go up with us to the South Col stayed at this Camp, while Ang Temba, Vohra and I left for the new Camp V. For this short journey Ang Temba and I took oxygen at three litres per minute, but Vohra preferred to go without oxygen. When we arrived at the new Camp V, we were greeted by Chowdhury and Bhagwanani and five Sherpas.

It was a beautiful day and we sat outside our tents for some time admiring the scenery and watching the sunset. After a good dinner we went to bed at 9.30 p.m. We slept well at Camp V with oxygen at one litre per minute. Next morning (May 25) we left for the South Col at 8 a.m. with twelve Sherpas. Earlier in the morning the wind was not strong but by 10.30 a.m. the weather started deteriorating fast with the formation of clouds appearing from all directions. The wind also increased. Some time after midday, through an opening in the clouds, Vohra saw the three members of the first summit team coming down

slowly. He could not make out exactly how high they were because visibility was very poor, but he felt they were nearly at 28,000 feet. We all wondered how they had fared.

While we were sheltered by the Geneva Spur we did not feel the impact of the wind, but as soon as we reached the South Col at 1.30 p.m. we felt its force. It was almost like a storm. There was also snow falling at the time. We were given a good reception by Jungalwala and his party who were expecting us. After some tea and tinned fruit we sent seven of our Sherpas back and kept only five with us. Whenever the visibility improved, we could see the first party climbing down very slowly. By 4 p.m. the wind was so strong at the Col that it was quite an effort to come out of the tent. Da Norbu and Pemba Sunder went up to meet Gombu, Kumar and Sonam. They took some tea in thermos flasks with them.

We were anxiously waiting for them. We had been told to rest as far as possible for our attempt, so we went out to meet the first party only after they had reached the South Col."

On May 25, I was still tied to the Base Camp. Kirpa, one of the mess boys, brought me a mug of tea very early in the morning and announced that it was not a very good day. There were thick clouds on the mountain. Well, there was nothing I could do. I felt like a commander who after making his plans thoroughly had committed his troops to action and, therefore, could do little to influence it until the battle had stabilised. However, I sent the following message on our broadcast system to all the climbers and Sherpas on the mountain: "You must have received the inspiring message from our Rashtrapati and our Defence Minister. The whole country waits in suspense and all thoughts are directed towards you. May the prayers of the millions, including ours at the Base Camp, make your steps lighter and help you to reach the top and return safely".

I could not help thinking constantly of our boys, plodding uphill in the rarified atmosphere on the heavily corniced south-east ridge of Everest. I could picture the swinging of the ice-axe, and could almost hear the ringing noise made by chunks of ice sliding and rolling down

the face, three to four thousand feet deep. I could hear the noise of the oxygen gas as it escaped under high pressure from cylinder into the bladder and then into the gas mask, the heavy breathing of Gombu, Kumar and Sonam and the rhythmic 'dub, dub' of the valves of the masks as they let in the rarified air and mixed it with pure, dry oxygen from the cylinder.

Occasionally, I could picture one of them taking off his mask to clear the valve. The moisture from the exhaled air in the mask cavity is liable to freeze some valves which must be cleared every now and then. I was, as it were, climbing with them, sitting in my tent without oxygen or special clothing and still very weak after my illness. I could picture the climbers changing the lead in turns, Gombu and Sonam in dark sky-blue windproof suits and Kumar in bright red. All of them wearing reindeer-hide boots specially made to measure for them. Kumar had my Gami camera, Sonam a sixteen mm. movie, rather heavy but Sonam was tough as an ox, Gombu had Tenzing's Leica. I even imagined them on the peak, taking pictures in turn.

So morning went and it was time for lunch. From the Base Camp we were through to Camp II where Nanda himself manned the '88' wireless set. Nanda had done a very good job. He had a touch of dysentery but he was carrying on cheerfully. Om Prakash Vaid and Balakrishnan were also very devoted workers and were constantly on duty these days. This signal detachment has done me proud. There was the '88' wireless link between the Base Camp and Camp II, and the telephone link between Camps II and III. But beyond this point communication was erratic. Wireless sets were there at the South Col with Jungalwala. Even the second party had taken some sets. But perhaps the batteries were down or it was too cold. It was also possible that at that altitude (26,000), there was hardly any inclination to try, experiment and persist to get through.

We got through to Nanda at Camp II every few minutes. He could see seven men start from Camp VI in the late afternoon. They were near Camp V. Perhaps they would bring the news. But they could only make Camp IV, beyond which no communication was possible. 'Khalifa' Grewal had written a note earlier to say that he was going to

Camp IV with a set. Perhaps he could not make it. At about 7 p.m. Nanda said there was no possibility of getting any news until the next day because the seven Sherpas had left the South Col before the summit team could have returned to the South Col. So they would have no information about the summit team. Only when the climbers returned would we know something definite.

Great disappointment! We had all been on tenterhooks the whole day. So had poor Mr. Sarin and people in Kathmandu. Anyway, we could do nothing about it. I sent a message to Mr. Sarin to stand the wireless stations down till 8.30 the next morning. The A.I.R. broadcasts had mentioned that we were attempting the peak. Early to bed. A strong sleeping pill this time.

The extract below from Kumar's diary gives the experience of the first summit party on the 25th which for us was a fateful day:

"When we got up at three we found that our feather-jacket collars were wet because of the icy water that had trickled down from the tent. We had melted enough snow before we had gone to bed and filled two thermos flasks with lime-juice. This was going to save time in the morning. The wind was very strong. We did not require much time to get ready because we had slept fully dressed and even had our boots on. We had not forgotten Hillary's boots which had frozen at this camp, and had taken nearly half an hour to thaw. I found my reindeer-hide boots quite comfortable inside my sleeping bag. By four we were ready to start, but the wind was much too strong. The sun was not up yet, so we waited in the hope that perhaps the wind would decrease later in the morning. We had finished our breakfast by six. We ate some *sampa*, drank the lime-juice and I also ate some sugar cubes. While we waited we melted some more snow to fill our flasks with more lime-juice for our journey to the peak. It was a strange coincidence that on the flask there was a picture of a mountain with the word Everest written on top.

At 6.30 in the morning the sun had already come up, but it hadn't warmed our tent much because the icicles were still

there. The wind showed no sign of abating, so we went out to have a look. It was a little misty on account of the drift snow. We decided that we must leave soon and kept hoping that the weather gods would be kinder later.

We started putting crampons on our boots. The leather straps were frozen and I must have pulled one of them a bit too hard, because it snapped. I had a thin nylon rope handy for such eventualities, so I was able to fasten my crampon without much difficulty.

In spite of an uncomfortable and sleepless night we felt remarkably fit for the climb. We collected our masks, bladders and regulators and the components of the oxygen apparatus and adjusted the flow at four litres per minute. We checked our rucksacks again, fastened our oxygen bottles and finally at 7 a.m. we moved off with Gombu on the lead and Sonam, the third man on the rope. We had hardly gone a few feet when Gombu noticed the poles of a tent. Perhaps it was the site of Tenzing's and Lambert's camp in 1952. Because of the strong wind we kept away from the exposed ridge and moved to the left of it. After a few minutes' climb we sighted the British Camp IX and recognised the black oxygen cylinder. The wind was very strong and the wind-chill factor made the cold so intense that it seemed to pierce through the marrow of our bones. Fifteen minutes after we had started, my oxygen apparatus started giving trouble. I had brought a spare mask and a bladder and was able to change them without much difficulty and we started moving up again.

I was praying all the time for the weather to improve. Although we were straining hard to climb and it helped us to remain warm, still it was so cold that I felt myself shivering inside my clothes. After another fifteen minutes I felt a strain on the rope behind me. As I looked back I noticed that Sonam had stopped and I could see that the bladder of his oxygen apparatus was blown up like a balloon. Gombu and I went down to help him. I disconnected the bladder and found that the inlet

valve of his mask was jammed with ice. I opened the valve and tried to clear it by blowing into it. But this had no effect: So I tried to scrape the ice with a matchstick. This also did not work. So, I used my knife and was able to remove a solid piece of ice which had jammed the valve. In the process, however, I broke the valve. I had another valve in my rucksack and was able to replace the defective valve. All this had wasted half an hour. It was very nearly 8.30 a.m. when we moved off again.

Sonam's oxygen apparatus had started working well but after half an hour Sonam again found difficulty in breathing. It was the same trouble again, but this time the ice was not so hard and I was able to remove it by using the knife carefully. Another ten minutes lost. We climbed up on mixed rock and ice for some distance; then after going over a bump we hit soft snow. We found the southern slope a bit too soft and sank knee deep in powdered snow and our progress became very slow.

By 10 o'clock, we found the wind raging even more fiercely than before. When we halted for a short rest we took photographs of Makalu, Lhotse and Nuptse. Up to this time, although the wind was quite strong, it was bearable. At 10.30 a.m. when we reached the crest of the ridge, our troubles began. The wind was now like a gale, and as we were on the crest, it hit us with great ferocity. We had very fine powdered snow all round us and the wind blew the snow off the ridge into our faces. We also noticed odd clouds drifting past. The drift snow was like a duststorm in a desert and the clouds reduced our visibility further.

We went over another bump and the conditions became worse. By now every step was an agony. Gombu, who was leading, took only one or two steps at a time and in order to avoid the drift snow he tried to move sideways. He would frequently turn his face backward, protecting it from the fury of the wind and the snow by holding his arm up. The chilling wind and the snow lashed our faces like a knife. Our faces seemed to be completely frozen and numb. Dry, powdered snow would fill

our goggles up through the small ventilation holes on the sides and we had to take our goggles off and clean them every five minutes or so.

A little before 11.30 a.m. we were at the bottom of the slope leading to the south summit. During the past hour our progress was getting slower and slower and we were feeling somewhat despondent because of the gale pitted against us. Visibility was by now reduced almost to nil. At 11.30 a.m. Gombu sat down. Sonam and I also flopped down behind him. We sat for about fifteen minutes, no talking or even looking at one another. In our minds, we knew that further progress was impossible in the face of such strong winds and driving snow, but none of us wished to utter the thought. Then Gombu turned and with his hands gestured, 'What shall we do?' Sonam and I could do no more than repeat the gesture. We sat still for some time and then Gombu broke the silence and said it was impossible to go further in these conditions. After some consultation we decided that there was no option but to withdraw.

We stopped and took a photograph of Gombu with flags on his ice-axe, and another looking down the ridge. Then started back with Sonam in the lead. Within a few minutes, he wandered off the track. I had to pull the rope and direct him on the track again. This was repeated six or seven times on the way down. Then, about half-an-hour after we started down, Gombu's oxygen valve jammed. I opened the bladder and blew into it, but could not clear it. So I tried to unscrew it from the mask and in the process the clip holding the valve to the mask came off and could not be reclipped. The result was that Gombu could not use his oxygen mask and had to come down without it. Progress now was very slow, indeed!

Sonam and I reduced the oxygen flow to two litres. Visibility and bad weather slowed down our progress almost to a crawl. Each one of us slipped a number of times and was held by the others. After a long struggle, we arrived at Camp VII at 4.30 p.m. There Gombu changed his oxygen mask and bladder.

Sonam who was very hungry and thirsty quietly slipped inside the tent and ate a good quantity of sugar and snow before he was discovered and restrained.

We rested for half-an-hour. By now the clouds had become thicker, reducing visibility further. We looked down at the South Col, which was occasionally bathed in sunshine, through fleeting windows in the clouds; and resumed our downhill journey at 5 p.m. disappointed, fatigued and dehydrated. After crossing the couloir, Sonam's oxygen apparatus again jammed. He was, however, fed up and just removed the mask and kept going. Since he was without oxygen, our progress was again slow. He rested more often and slipped twice but was held on the rope.

Da Norbu and Pemba Sunder, two of the Sherpas who had seen us coming down, came to meet us at about fifteen or twenty minutes' distance from Camp VI and brought two flasks of tea, which was very welcome. They asked us whether we had made the top. The expression on our faces gave them the answer. They enquired about our health and took our loads. We reached the South Col after 6.30 p.m. and were met by Jungalwala, Kohli, Vohra, Ang Temba and the Sherpas. We told them our tale. After drinking some mugs of liquid we went straight into our sleeping bags. Jungalwala came and put some food in our mouths as we were sleeping.

At night Sonam and I felt pain in our hands. Next morning on removing our gloves we discovered that the tip of the middle finger of my left hand and all the finger tips on one of Sonam's hands were frost-bitten. This must have happened when we tried to repair the oxygen apparatus. We had been fully briefed by the doctors regarding first-aid for frost-bite so we promptly took priscol tablets and applied priscol ointment on the affected fingers."

On the 26th morning, Kumar briefed Kohli about the route to Camp VII and beyond and gave him what advice he could. The weather was still very bad. At 10.30 a.m. the first summit party

accompanied by Jungalwala started for the downward journey. They used oxygen but Jungalwala climbed down without it. They arrived at Camp V at 2 p.m. and from there, on the wireless set, gave Nanda the news which was relayed to me at the Base.

We had anxiously waited for news the whole of the 25th. When we got up on the 26th morning we were sure we would hear something. There was, however, no word from the first summit party or anyone else. Contact with Nanda at Camp II and his efforts to get something from Camp V brought out nothing. Camp V had received no news.

At 1.30 p.m. we had just finished lunch when Om Prakash Vaid, the signaller, again went to the '88' set to get through to Nanda. Nanda was at that time through to Grewal and Da Nanigyal, both of whom were at Camp V. We felt that the first party must have reached Camp V. There was an air of suspense and expectancy. The atmosphere was tense with excitement. All members crowded round the '88' set. Gopal the photographer brought out his sixteen m.m. movie camera. He took close-ups and distant shots of the waiting people and a few Sherpas looking hopefully in the direction of the wireless set. Why are they taking such a long time to break the news? Nanda was talking to Camp V, therefore the Base Camp was told to shut up.

After some time Misra came quietly and sat near me and said slowly: "They have not made it. They reached 28,300 feet. Strong winds and blinding driven snow plus frozen oxygen bladders. They have got minor frost-bite. They returned to the South Col completely beaten after 6 p.m."

I froze where I sat. I could say nothing. I could ask nothing. A thick blanket of gloom had spread over the Camp. All faces looked drawn, haggard and tired. No one was prepared for the news. Nobody wanted to believe it. Sonam and the others had gone up with such confidence and their strength, vitality and optimism were so infectious. When one sees Sonam, it is impossible to think of anything but success. Then, why did he fail? We had everything. Nothing was lacking. The climbers were in good condition. But the weather gods were angry with us. Strong winds, extreme cold, blinding snow, and above all, freezing of the oxygen equipment. What could poor Sonam or Gombu or Kumar do?

I sat there for a few minutes absolutely stunned by the news. But then I realised my duty as the Leader. It was my duty to say a few encouraging words to the others. When I looked round I found that this was necessary. I said a few cheery words. "28,300 feet is no mean achievement. It is a sport. Whether we succeed or fail we should be satisfied with the effort." I spoke with as much conviction as I could command, but the words sounded a little hollow.

People in India were anxiously waiting for the news. Mr. Sarin had been sending signal after signal asking for it. I quickly drafted a signal to him giving the factual picture. I pointed out that the second party was at the South Col and could not move to Camp VII on account of bad weather and strong winds. I wanted to go to my tent but decided against it. My place was with the boys who were very upset. Om Prakash, the signaller, was dejected. Gopal, Sohan, Keki, the doctor, Misra and Rajendra Vikram all looked sad and downcast. So when Rajendra Vikram asked me if I would record my feeling on the tape recorder, this is what I had to say:

"I am naturally disappointed at the news. So is everyone else because everyone hopes for success. But I am satisfied that Gombu, Sonam and Kumar have made a gallant attempt and have done their best; and when you have done your best you cannot do any better. They were pitched against the elements, the weather was against them and on such a high mountain the weather certainly becomes the most predominant factor.

This brave trio has climbed up to a height of 28,300 feet, only 700 feet short of the top—no mean achievement when done against such heavy odds! I am personally satisfied with the performance of the team and although, strictly speaking, it is the failure of the expedition, I do not think the expedition has failed in its aims.

The second team which is now at the South Col was to leave for Camp VII today but the weather is deteriorating hourly and they could not go. It will be a miracle if they are able to make an attempt. The monsoon seems to be on top of us. We have waited patiently for the pre-monsoon lull. The weather gods are

not indulgent enough and, therefore, we have to return home with our *namaskar* to goddess Chomolungma. In any case, we have the satisfaction that our boys have reached a point which is higher than any other peak in the world except Everest itself."

As the mail runner was leaving the next morning, I quickly finished writing a few important letters, and went back to the Mess tent to be with the boys. They had not expected a failure in their mental planning, so the shock was even greater. In the evening A.I.R. announced the news. A.I.R. also broadcast a message from the Sponsoring Committee, which had not yet reached us. It read: "For Brig. Gyan Singh from Sarin. Received your message of today. Under such severe weather conditions the performance of first party has been magnificent. Win or lose, our team has shown praiseworthy courage. We all hope and pray for success in second attempt and above all for your safe return."



सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ।

Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat.

—BHAGAVAD GITA

15

The Withdrawal

Although we had slept over the news one night, in my case drugged with a sleeping pill, we hadn't yet reconciled ourselves to it. We still did not wish to believe it. Our thoughts and a very faint ray of hope rested on the second team's attempt, but the weather had not shown any signs of improvement. I estimated the chances of success at one per cent and the more optimistic of us at five per cent. A miracle was required to bring about the appropriate conditions for climbing. Still some of us clutched on to that little ray of hope.

When we got up on the 27th morning, even the last ray of hope vanished. It had snowed at night and the sky was completely overcast. The weather forecast broadcast by All India Radio promised no improvement. In the morning it started snowing heavily and our wishes and hopes for a second attempt turned into anxiety for the safe return of the second team and the Sherpas.

I sent a message on the wireless to Camp III to start the withdrawal at top speed. I also asked them to pass a message to the second team not to go further. We kept our fingers crossed for their safe descent over the Lhotse Face as there was a real risk of avalanches on account of the fresh snowfall.

The first summit team was due to return that afternoon. We had heard about the minor frostbite on Kumar's and Sonam's fingers. Practically everyone at the Base Camp was looking in the direction of the ice-fall the whole afternoon, waiting for Gombu, Kumar and Sonam. I allotted various tasks to the members in preparation for our return. This also helped to keep their minds occupied.

Gombu, Kumar and Sonam returned at five in the afternoon

looking very thin, tired and dried up. They had spent many hours in the so-called "deterioration zone" beyond 22,000 feet, and one day of veritable hell. Everyone clustered round them when they arrived and shook hands with them. They looked very dejected and came to me in turn and told me in a heavy voice how sorry they were for not being able to make it. Within a few minutes of their arrival we arranged to get their story and impressions transmitted over the wireless link. At Kathmandu the transmission was recorded on a tape straight from the wireless receiver, to be flown to Delhi the next day for broadcast by All India Radio.

Nanda and Chowdhury returned from the higher camps that evening and brought news that Girmi, the assistant Sardar, was very ill. Our Sardar, Passang Phutar, had fallen off an ice-wall while repairing the route and had hurt his back badly. When the doctor saw him at the Base Camp, he was not quite sure if it was a muscular sprain or a fracture. But Passang Phutar was soon up and about even though he complained of a pain in his back.

Das was kept very busy as the people returned from the higher camps, because practically everyone needed some medical attention.

I was relieved to hear that the second party was seen coming down to Camp V that afternoon.

It was snowing steadily on the morning of the 28th May. My first thoughts went to the Sherpas and climbers on the mountain. The weather was really atrocious and there were no signs of improvement. The weather forecast mentioned unsettled conditions and depression in the north Bay which was an indication that worse weather was to follow. I had already passed a message that those who were sick or weak had to be given first priority for the return journey. The Sherpas should be used to help them down even if it meant leaving some equipment behind.

'Khalifa' Grewal, who had sent a message the evening before, painted a very grim picture of weather conditions in the Western Cwm. The going was very heavy because at every step they sank knee deep in fresh snow. Visibility was almost nil, and it was still snowing when he wrote that note. I sent a message that May 29 was to be the

last day on the mountain. I was particularly anxious about Girmi who, I was told, was in a very weak condition and had to be brought on the back of a Sherpa from Camp III to Camp II. Bhagwanani who accompanied him sent a note to say that they had floundered for hours in the Cwm because of poor visibility. The tracks were completely obliterated and the flags marking the route had been blown away or buried. The trip from Camp II to the Base Camp had become most hazardous; to bring a patient on a stretcher or even on a Sherpa's back appeared impossible.

That day we received a message from the Sponsoring Committee of the expedition. It read; "We received news late last night that you were withdrawing. We would like you and the members of the expedition to know how greatly we admire your efforts and that we warmly congratulate you on your achievements. We hope that you will not feel disappointed. No one knows better than you do how greatly success depends on the weather and in this you were not lucky. You have given mountaineering in our country a great fillip and we are very grateful to you. We hope you will all return in tip-top condition."

Another 'Sarin touch' and a very thoughtful one. When I read out the message to the boys in the Mess tent, they were very happy. Mr. Sarin was then the subject of discussion for nearly half an hour. Every family had written back in gratitude about Mr. Sarin's thoughtful bi-weekly letters to them giving up-to-date information about our progress and welfare. Thanks to Mr. Sarin we never felt we were sitting in the wilderness and we knew that he had been subjected to considerable pressure of work on account of the expedition. He had never kept us waiting for anything we wanted. I doubt if any other expedition had been lucky enough to have such a guardian angel.

Kohli returned that evening looking very tired and dejected and told us that after having waited two nights at the South Col they found the weather even worse on the 27th morning. Throughout the night violent winds had blown powdered snow inside the tent. The clouds were very heavy and it was snowing steadily. They waited for a few hours hoping that the weather might improve, but it grew worse, so at 10 o'clock they decided to return. Ang Temba and Vohra stayed

at Camp V, but Kohli unwiseiy decided to leave for the Advance Base Camp with another Sherpa where he arrived very late in the evening.

Ever since May 24 the Sherpas returning from Camp II ferried important items of equipment back to the Base Camp. Rao, who had been made responsible for packing the stores, was working overtime preparing lists, and crating stores and equipment.

May 29 was the last day on the mountain. The weather had denied us the peak, but we hoped that it would let our climbers and Sherpas return safely. It had not snowed at night and the morning was only slightly cloudy.

By 5 in the afternoon all men and Sherpas returned safely with as much equipment as they could bring. I was very happy to see that Girmi was down safely. He was taken in hand by Das straightway. Grewal brought down the rear party and here is an extract from his diary about the last day on the mountain.

"It was a day of great activity at Camp III and Camp II. We were to make the last move down the ice-fall today with all the men and all possible equipment. Da Naimgyal, with a party of fifteen Sherpas, reached Camp II from Camp III at about 10 a.m. Vohra and Ang Temba had also accompanied the party from Camp III

We were lucky that the weather, which had been extremely bad for the last three days, unexpectedly improved today and we are confident that Sonam Girmi can be taken down safely. It is almost impossible to carry anybody through the ice-fall when it is in a bad shape. Girmi showed great determination and courage in undertaking the trip without being carried, in spite of his unsatisfactory condition. He was accompanied by Bhagwanani and two strong Sherpas on one rope. Ang Temba, Vohra and myself remained with them on another rope in case our help was required. Our movement was obviously very slow, but we made the Base Camp well in time before sunset.

Everybody was down from the mountain safely. When I reached the camp as the last man of the party, the Leader and

the other members came forward and shook hands. All of us were naturally depressed by the failure of the expedition, but our Leader's appearance revived confidence in all of us. After all, it is not the summit that matters so much, but the struggle for the summit; not the victory but the game itself."

In addition to the tents and other stores left at the South Col and Camp V, a number of heavier items of equipment had to be abandoned in the Cwm. I was sorry to lose the equipment but the important thing was that all men were safely back from the mountain and in reasonably good health. The previous four days had been a period of great tension for me. Tenzing's words, "A really successful expedition is one in which everybody comes back safely", were ringing in my ears and giving me solace.

On the 29th evening all our Sherpas and climbers once again came together at the Base Camp after almost eight weeks. The next two days were spent in feverish activity in packing, checking stores and equipment, preparing the plan for the return movement and paying off Sherpas who wanted to go home early.

We had planned to start on our return journey on June 1. The two hundred porters we wanted to take us back to Kathmandu arrived very early from Namche Bazar and the surrounding villages. Rao and the other members who were helping him had laid out the equipment clearly numbered, and had started allotting the loads to the porters.

At last, the day to leave the Base Camp had come. We had been there for nearly two months. It had been a place for rest, for planning, of calm as well as of frantic activity. There we had waited for days for good weather, and there some of us had waited anxiously for news from the higher camps. Others had returned to the Base Camp after fatigue and exhaustion in order to recuperate and to return to the mountain. We had stared at the ice-fall for hours and had seen it change daily. We had watched our ferries go up and had looked forward to their safe return every evening. We had witnessed with ecstasy the beautiful sunrise, and had often observed the snow and ice formation in the moonlight. As the weather changed we had noticed the landscape visibly altering before our eyes. With all these intimate

associations it was only natural that on leaving that place, howsoever rugged and uncomfortable, we should have felt a pang of separation.

Time is a great healer. I had already got used to the fact that we hadn't made the peak. I also began to feel that the first trio had made a gallant attempt and had done their best, and having done their best they could not have done any more. We had gone with no pretensions about our ability to reach the peak. We had gone to climb the mountain and, as far as we had gone, I thought we had climbed well. We had learnt to pitch our skill, our technique and our determination against physical obstacles. But, for the peak, the odds against us were too great. On a high mountain the weather is and will always remain the most decisive factor. I recalled what Frank Smythe, the famous British mountaineer and philosopher, had said of the moods of Everest: "Everest on a sunny windless day can be almost agreeable to climb and if to this were added a sufficiency of oxygen to breathe, it would possibly be enjoyable. As it is, the lack of oxygen and the oft-recurring storms transfer it into a mountain that is implacably hostile and daring you to take a step forward—at your own peril"

I was glad Gombu, Kumar and Sonam had taken the wise but difficult decision to return, and did not take suicidal risks, because mountaineering is a sport and there are certain safety limits which must not be transgressed. All veteran mountaineers have wisely said that risky mountaineering is bad mountaineering, and that in order to achieve his aim and reach the top a mountaineer is justified in taking only calculated risks. In any case, I consoled myself with the thought that our climbers had reached a point which was higher than any other mountain in the world, except Everest itself.

Apart from the summit teams, there were numerous other examples of praiseworthy devotion to duty, self-reliance and endurance by the members. Jungalwala had made two trips to the South Col, the first time without oxygen, and the second time he had stayed there three nights. He displayed remarkable stamina and guts. Bhagwanani, our doctor, who had no previous experience of high-altitude climbing, went to Camp V (24,000 feet) twice to attend to patients and stayed for a long time in the Western Cwm giving medical cover to the Sherpas and members. Equally, Das had almost worn himself out

attending to anyone who needed attention. Chowdhury, Grewal and Misra spent considerable time in the higher camps and bore with commendable patience the drudgery of escorting higher ferries and keeping the communications open. Da Namgyal, in spite of his illness, went twice to Camp V from the Advance Base Camp in his role as adviser to the summit teams. Gopal, the photographer, amazed me by his endurance and courage in going up to the Western Cwm to take photographs. Although he was quite steady on the ice, the wobbly way in which he came down scared me. Rao, our Meteorological Officer, was my constant adviser on weather conditions and gave a reliable interpretation of the very accurate weather forecasts sent to us by the Meteorological Department three times a day through the courtesy of All India Radio. He was also a great help to me in administrative matters, and, although he had never been on mountain or ice before, he had the guts to go three quarters of the way up the ice-fall in order to take certain meteorological observations.

That evening, reclining on my sleeping bag, I shut my eyes and looked back at the amount of effort that had gone into the last eight months. I thought of the unstinted support from the Sponsoring Committee, round-the-clock work by our ordnance factories and other firms, the sacrifice and hard work of various members and all the work of hundreds of people that had made the expedition possible. I recalled the advice and encouragement we had received from our Prime Minister. All these impressions flitted through my mind in a few seconds. As I opened my eyes again I looked at the equipment littered in my tent and wondered at the number of items that had to be procured for this great venture. I stared at the golden flames of the two slow-burning candles made by the children of the Blind Institute in New Delhi, and reflected thoughtfully on the paradoxical irony of the fact that, while the innocent children who made these candles were in perpetual darkness themselves, they, by their efforts, had brought light to others.

We said farewell to Chomolungma and departed with a promise to return and a prayer that next time the Mother Goddess of the Winds would permit us full access.

Defeat is not failure so long as the will to try again persists. The true value of expeditions will not be found at any moment of victory or of defeat, but in the striving and the discovering, for which all men are made.

W.H. MURRAY

16

The Road Back

Our plans for the movement from the Base Camp had gone smoothly when an unexpected crisis occurred over the wages of the porters. I heard the noise of a large number of porters walking away from the loads. As I approached the stampeding men who were threatening to run away, I saw Jungalwala trying to restore peace with the men in his hoarse voice which was hardly audible above the din.

Rao told me that two ringleaders had incited the porters to demand more money than had been agreed upon for their round trip to Kathmandu and back to their homes. I intervened and asked Jungalwala and the others not to stop them and informed them that they could go away and that I was prepared to wait at the Base Camp another four days and recruit new men. When the porters heard this they stopped at some distance away. Then Sonam and I went up to the two ringleaders and told them that if we heard them inciting the others, we would have to hand them over to the police. As soon as the ringleaders were quietened, the porters came back and agreed to carry the loads at the rates we had already fixed. The two ringleaders had to go back to their villages without any loads.

On June 1, we completed three stages of the outward journey and reached Phalong Karpo (14,500 feet) and on June 2, we reached Thyangboche Monastery. Our appetites improved as soon as we came to lower altitudes and we could now sleep without the help of sleeping pills.

On the way to Thyangboche, Keki, Das and I called at the Monastery at Pangboche and requested the Lama to show us the scalp of the Yeti for which the Monastery seemed to be famous. On our Sardar's recommendation we had promised to leave a Petromax lamp for the Monastery. We received considerable attention from the Lamas, who also brought out the scalp. Das was not able to comment on the genuineness of the scalp, which consisted of a quarter-inch thick hide and was conical in shape, and slightly larger than an average human head. The hair on the outside of the scalp was like a hog's bristles. The Lamas also showed us the skeleton of a hand supposed to be that of the Yeti. Keki took a number of pictures of the scalp as well as the skeleton. That was as near as we got to the "Abominable Snowman", although on our way out there were a number of attempts by local Sherpas to persuade us to go looking for the Yeti.

That afternoon at Thyangboche we were received by the Incarnate Lama. He had already heard about the result of our efforts and consoled us. He said; "This was your first attempt and you need not be disheartened at your failure to reach the peak. Tenzing had tried seven times before he reached the top. You have done well and climbed the mountain in spite of bad weather which was expected to be abnormal this year because there was very little snowfall last winter. Your success lies in the fact that you have brought all climbers and Sherpas back safely and alive. I congratulate you and hope that you will succeed in your next attempt."

Later, during the conversation, while talking about the money spent on the expedition, the young Lama, who was wise for his years, remarked: "Why worry about the money? Man earns money; money does not earn Man."

That evening he entertained us to dinner. Before taking leave of him, we offered him a small donation for the Monastery, consisting of some tinned food, a few simple medicines, a Petromax lamp and fifty-one candles. As we left, he gave us a scarf each.

There was a small procession outside Namche Bazar when we reached there at about 10 o'clock the next day. A number of men and women came out and sat near the track, offering free *chhang* to the

Sherpas and members of the expedition. We called at nearly half a dozen houses before we said goodbye to the very friendly residents of this village.



Our return journey to Kathmandu was comparatively uneventful. We had been at lower altitudes for a few days and after good food and good sleep most of us had regained our strength and energy even though we still looked very thin.

Three or four days after we had left Namche Bazar, I discovered that practical jokes amongst the members were on the increase. By now we knew one another very well and that was perhaps one of the reasons why some of the younger members were able to pick on others who were sensitive to such jokes.

One elderly member of the party found one morning that his dentures, which he had placed in a mug of water the night before, as well as his spare set were missing. This nearly created a major incident. Large quantities of chicken had been cooked and the victim was particularly fond of it. He could not bear the idea of going without it. The dentures were eventually restored to the rightful owner together with some nicely done chicken! So all was well.

There were a number of quite stiff climbs but we had such good training that we did not mind the ascents at all. In fact we feared the down-hill treks more. Our trip back was a real holiday because the quartermaster had made sure that we got good food. It was also pleasant once again to be in a world of colour and beautiful vegetation, after having spent two months on the snows where, except for our bright coloured clothes, we were virtually starved of colour.

There were numerous messages exchanged between us, Kathmandu and Delhi regarding our programme in the two capitals. Our Ambassador in Kathmandu was good enough to say that we should not hesitate to ask if we wanted any help. He also very kindly arranged for transport to meet us at Banepa, nearly twenty miles from Kathmandu.

When we started on our homeward journey from the Base Camp, I was not quite sure how our failure would be taken in the country. We had spent nearly six hundred thousand rupees and there was considerable publicity about the expedition, particularly towards the end. We had sent regular messages giving our progress which must have appeared very spectacular because in our daily messages we had reported, not on the difficulties on the mountain, but our achievements. We had trained the public, as we had trained ourselves, to receive only one type of news, and that was about our success.

Then, unexpectedly, after building up hopes, the anti-climax came and we announced that we had been turned back by the weather. Under the circumstances, it would have been quite understandable if the Press as well as the general public were dissatisfied with our attempt. But I think we had misjudged our people and our Press.

We were naturally anxious to get back and find out for ourselves how the news of our attempt had been received. Keki had received a letter from his father who had written to say that in addition to front page coverage, most of the important dailies had carried editorials on the expedition after we had decided to withdraw.

A few days before we reached Kathmandu, the mail runner brought some newspapers. Here we saw the first editorial in *The Times of India*, which read: "...The team has given the finest account of itself

even in the most trying of conditions. The members of the expedition have shown that they have the stuff great mountaineers are made of: technical skill, determination, courage and discipline." I had written six articles for *The Times of India* regarding the progress of the expedition. The paper had taken great interest in us and I felt that it had been very generous in its comments about us.

We arrived at Banepa on June 17, and were met by the staff of the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu. Press representatives and other friends. My wife, who had arrived in Kathmandu three or four days earlier, was at Banepa to receive us.

At Banepa we were given some more Press cuttings. Gopal brought to me a copy of *The Hindu*, which said: "...that the Indian expedition to Everest had to be given up in the face of adverse weather, need not be a matter of gloom. The early setting in of monsoon conditions was indeed unfortunate, but by reaching 28,300 feet of the treacherous climb, the Indian mountaineers have shown that they can strive after great things with all the grit, endurance and skill called for by the task. The Leader's decision to withdraw has been hailed as a wise, though difficult one in the light of the persistently bad weather."

The Statesman takes considerable interest in mountaineering activities and I was anxious to know what the paper had to say about us. The relevant issue of *The Statesman* was brought to me and its editorial read: "...the Indian expedition's courageous first attempt on the biggest of prizes, Everest, thwarted by abominable weather, will remain a proud chapter in the history of man's encounter with mountains, whether or not the peak is eventually reached."

The Amrita Bazar Patrika, *The Hindustan Times*, *Indian Express*, *Leader* and many other papers were good enough to write in a similar vein. We were all deeply touched by this approbation.

After paying off our porters and having been entertained to light refreshments on the roadside by the Embassy staff, we drove to the Indian Embassy where our Ambassador, Mr. Harishwar Dayal, and his wife entertained us to tea. The hospitality shown to us by our Ambassador and his staff and the rest of the Indian population was very touching. We had barely two days in Kathmandu but those were

hectic days full of engagements for dinner, lunch and 'At Homes'. On June 18, I called at the Nepalese Foreign Office and also met the Prime Minister, Mr. Koirala, who evinced great interest in our adventure and wished us better luck in our next attempt. Before we left, we were entertained to dinner by the officers of the Indian Military Training Advisory Group. Here I was happy to meet and thank personally the detachment of the Signals Corps which had kept us in communication with Delhi throughout our three months' sojourn in the mountains.

On June 20, we were given a warm send-off by the Ambassador and members of the Embassy staff, and the Indian Army Officers and their families.

The Air Force Dakota that flew the team from Kathmandu to Delhi touched down at Palam airport exactly at 1 p.m. We were all quite moved to see a crowd with bouquets and garlands waiting for us. Mr. N.R. Pillai, the Chairman of the Sponsoring Committee, and all the members of the Committee who were in Delhi, and our relations and friends were there to greet us. There were many scenes of happy reunion and an uninhibited display of emotion.

As soon as we landed, each one of us was presented with an excellent brochure which Mr. Sarin had got out on the expedition. This had up-to-date facts and information about the work of the expedition and some very good photographs taken by the members. Mr. Sarin and all those connected with the production of this excellent booklet must have worked overtime to get all the information and photographs arranged and printed in such a short time. The brochure covered all our activities, including the date of our arrival in Delhi.

Mr. Sarin also gave each one of us a slip of paper on which our engagements for the next few days were listed. We were then driven to the Central Vista Mess where the Sponsoring Committee entertained us to a very good lunch. Mr. Pillai, in his eloquent speech at the lunch, expressed appreciation on his own behalf, and on behalf of the Sponsoring Committee and the nation, of our endeavour to reach the top of Everest.

The next day there was a Press conference at Vigyan Bhavan which was attended by about fifty representatives of Indian and foreign newspapers. The Press correspondents asked some very interesting and searching questions about the expedition. This kind of interest augured well for Indian mountaineering.

Many sympathetic people had called our attempt a "near success". While I did not regard our failure to reach the top as a failure in realising all our aims, we certainly had not reached the summit. It will be hypocritical to deny that the principal aim of most expeditions is to climb the peak, and in that we had not succeeded.

We had set ourselves two other aims which, in my view, were as important as the first, and in those we had succeeded. The first of these aims was to train young climbers on a high mountain which would give them prolonged experience in all aspects of high altitude climbing. From this angle the expedition was equivalent to four or five expeditions put together. Three of our climbers shared the honour with less than a dozen climbers in the world of having reached an altitude of 28,300 feet. On May 24, ten men of the expedition, including seven Sherpas, had reached 27,600 feet, and four other climbers and thirty-three Sherpas had reached the South Col (26,000 feet). The experience and maturity as mountaineers acquired by our climbers must make some of them good leaders for future expeditions.

The most significant achievement of our expedition was in the field of development of mountaineering equipment. In barely three and a half months, we had developed from a scratch mountaineering clothing and equipment; had these manufactured in India and nearly climbed Everest with them.

The prototypes were made in Indian factories, they were tried in the mountains and were improved upon; re-tried and evaluated once again after intensive high altitude exposure under severe wintery conditions before orders for manufacture were placed.

In the case of climbing boots, three different trial evaluation exercises were conducted, the final one by Lieut. M.S. Kohli, in Khilanmarg above Gulmarg in Kashmir, during the winter of 1959-60. Only

then the climbing boots were cleared for final production. Bata's small Research and Development unit which was especially created for us, worked almost round the clock to meet the expedition's requirements of hand-made "Cho-Oyu" type climbing boots.

Mr. H.C. Sarin, President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in an article later, commented "eighty per cent of the equipment was made in Indian factories and the quality of the equipment was good."

India-made mountaineering gear including climbing boots had stood the test of real heights. It had reached the South Col. (26000 feet) reputed as the most inhospitable place on earth. That was in 1960 when Indian mountaineering was in its infancy with only about a dozen minor expeditions behind it.

Our last, and to us the most important, engagement was an 'At Home' at the Prime Minister, Mr. Nehru's house on June 24. The Prime Minister was very happy to meet us and asked us not to be disheartened by our failure to reach the peak. He said it was not the success or failure, but the experience we had brought back which mattered. He hoped we would have better luck next time.

The Vice-President, Dr. Radhakrishnan, also attended the function. He greeted us affectionately and had some very kind words to say about our attempt.

During my conversation with him, Dr. Radhakrishnan had asked me to see him later.

I called at the UpRashtrapati's bungalow two days later and was treated to a light breakfast served with delicious coffee of the quality and flavour which one can get only in a South Indian house.

Later, after settling down in a comfortable sofa chair, Dr. Radhakrishnan picked up his copy of the *Gita* and recited a few Sanskrit verses. When he finished, he looked at me, smiled and with a twinkle in his eyes, said "I suppose you have understood all that?"

"Not a word, Sir," I replied at once. "It has gone completely over my head".



An affectionate welcome for the Leader from his wife

Atop Everest

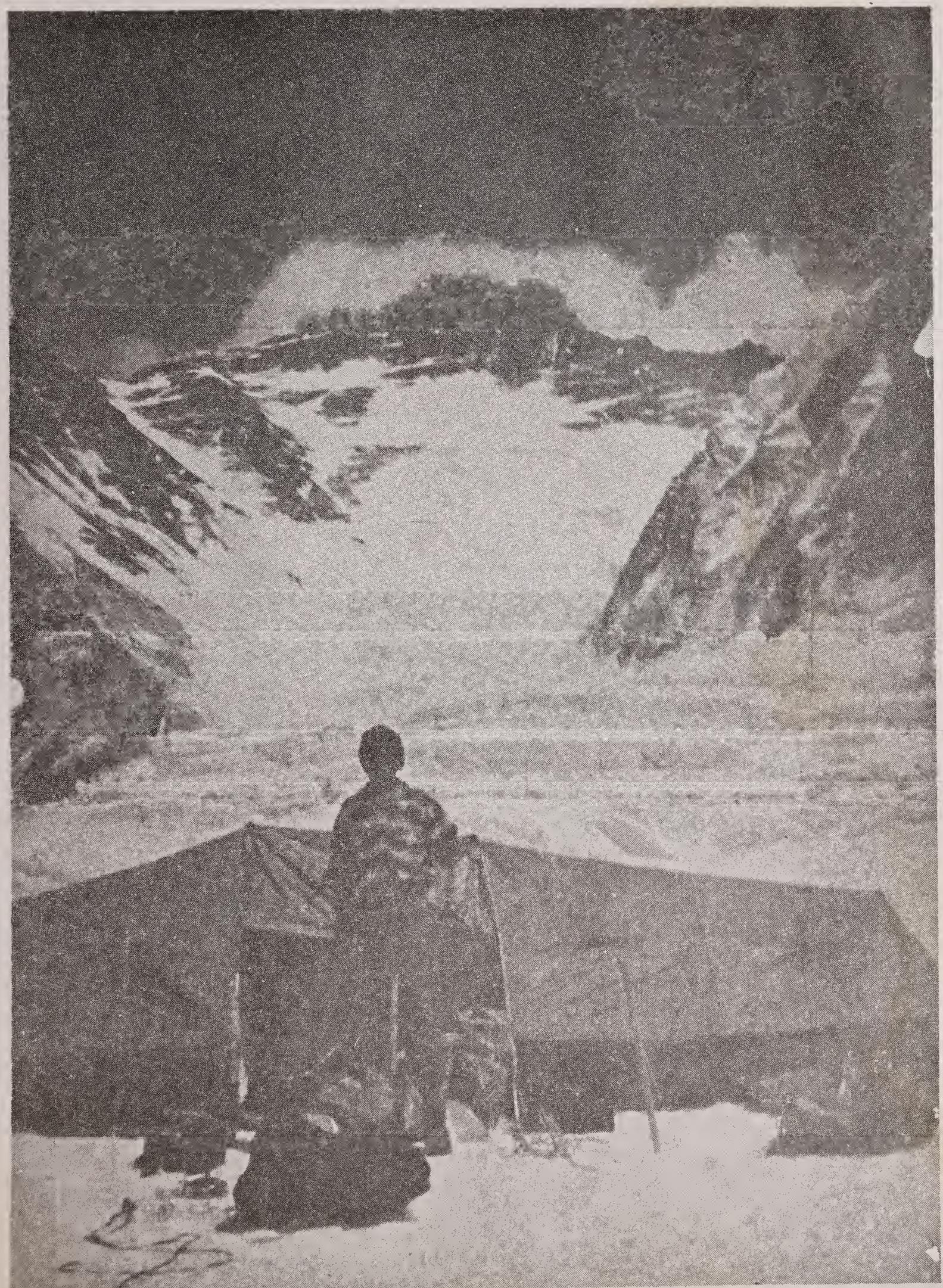




The scalp and the skeleton hand of an Yeti preserved Pangboche Monastery

Coloured flags for route-marking





Camp II—Lhotse and Western cwm in the background



A team of load-ferrying sherpas

He laughed loudly and, without his usual turban, looked so different. "I'll tell you," he said. "In His discourse to Arjuna, Lord Krishna had explained that five ingredients or factors were essential for the accomplishment of all human actions. 'The first factor is the seat of action which for you was Everest. The second, 'the agent', that is the team of climbers and their supporters. The third factor is the 'instruments of various sorts' which for your expedition were the equipment, the special clothing, the stores, food, etc. The fourth ingredient is 'the many kinds of efforts made'. This implies training, planning, preparation and effort on the mountain which you made. Providence or *Daivyam* is the fifth."

"In all human actions," Dr. Radhakrishnan added, "there is an unaccountable element which is called luck, destiny, fate or the force accumulated by the acts of one's past lives. In the language of the *Gita* it is called *Daivyam*. The first four factors can be used by man as he wishes but he has no control over *Daivyam*. Therefore, his duty is to do his best without any regard for the result. One undertakes a thing not because one hopes to succeed, but because one thinks it is right. Action alone is the province, never the fruits thereof; let not Thy motive be the fruit of action."

Despite my team's failure to climb Everest, Pandit Nehru invited me to address the joint session of the two houses of Parliament. According to the then Lok Sabha Speaker, Shri Ananthasayanam Ayyangar this was the unique honour for a commoner like me. "Only heads of States address the two houses from this rostrum", he whispered in my ear after introducing me.

The Abiding Challenge of Everest

With barely 5 years of climbing experience our mountaineers were mere toddlers when we attempted Everest in 1960. Yet we had all but succeeded. The near success spurred the Sponsoring Committee to book Everest for 1962.

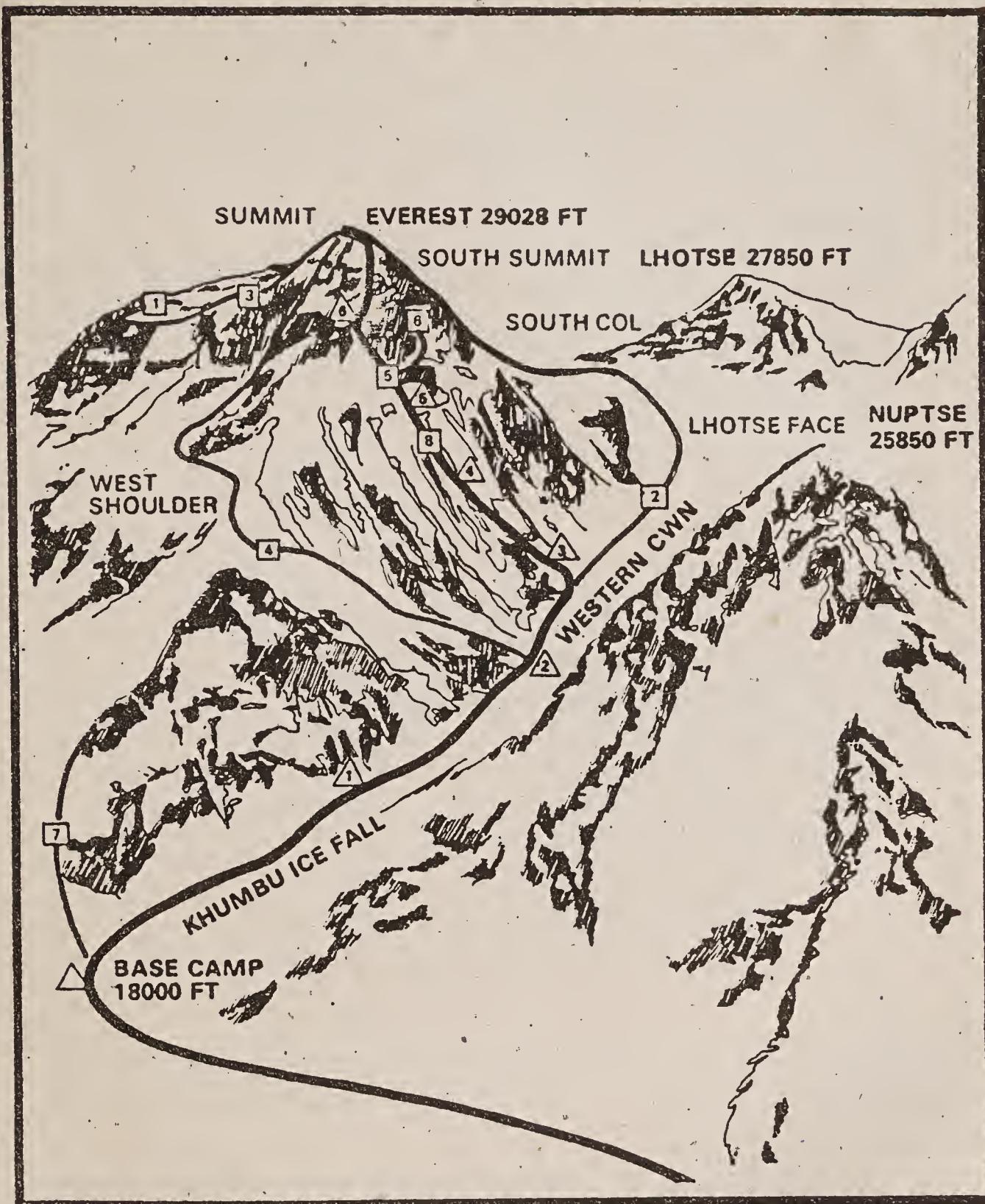
Under the dynamic leadership of Major John Dias (John D to his friends) the summit party of the expedition comprising Kohli, Sonam Gyatso and Hari Dang reached, on the 30th May, a point which was only 450 feet short of the Summit. But, like the 1960 team, they were also turned back, again not by the mountain but by the relentlessly cruel weather against which man has no weapon in his armoury.

However, some remarkable feats of human endurance at higher altitude were performed on this expedition. The summit team had spent three consecutive nights at the highest camp (27,659 feet), more than half the time without oxygen. They had climbed to the summit camp after having spent the preceding two nights at the South Col (nearly 26,000 feet).

Expedition Sirdar, Ang Tharkay, who was 53 years old, carried a full load to the highest camp. Gurdial Singh and one Sherpa spent six consecutive nights at the South Col camp, most of the time without oxygen. According to physiologists, heights beyond 22,000 feet are the "deterioration zone" while those above 26,000 feet are considered as the "death zone."

Suman Dubey (19) was probably the only teenager to have ever reached the high South Col camp and spent three nights there. Capt. M.A. Soares, one of the expedition doctors, spent 45 consecutive days at Camp III (21,200 feet).

Despite the second failure, the lure and the challenge of Everest continued. "We will come back," John Dias had promised as he and his team took leave of Chomolungma, "Mother Goddess of the Winds."



Atop Everest

(1) Pre-war North Ridge attempts. (2) South Col route taken by successful British Expedition led by Colonel Hunt, Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing. (3) Route claimed to have been taken by the Chinese in 1960. (4) American Expedition of 1963. (5) Japanese reconnaissance of the South West Face in Autumn 1969. (6) Point reached by International Expedition in the Spring of 1971 and European Expedition in the Spring of 1972. (7) French Expedition's West Ridge route in Autumn 1974. (8) Route of the British Expedition of 1975.

1965—Nine Atop Everest

Capt. M.S. Kohli, who was a member of the first and Deputy Leader of the second Indian Everest expeditions, was chosen to lead India's third team to Everest in 1965.

After a pre-Everest training camp organised under the auspices of the HMI Darjeeling, a strong 15 men team was selected for the next attempt in the summer of 1965. The team included stalwarts of mountaineering like Gurdial Singh, Sonam Gyatso, Kumar, C.P. Vohra and Nawang Gombu. Gombu had already climbed Everest as a member of the American expedition in 1963.

Like the first and the second expeditions, Kohli's team took the familiar approach route and reached the Base Camp on March 22, 1965. The climbers and the Sherpas were fully aware of the dark moods of the mountain particularly when it was aided by utterly hostile weather.

Kohli had by now developed into a mature mountaineer. He was also a discerning and cautious Leader. To ensure success he followed the well rehearsed strategy and tactics of the earlier expeditions. Working in pairs his determined and highly motivated team members opened the route through the treacherous ice-fall. They inched their way up the exposed and slippery ice and frozen snow slopes of Lhotse Face to reach the inhospitable wind-swept South Col Camp on April 16, followed by two more ferries of essential stores and equipment in the next week.

With the South Col Camp adequately stocked, the expedition was now set for the final and crucial phase of its operation. If only the weather would hold out.

But that was not to be. As soon as Kohli's first summit party of four on two ropes and its support elements reached the South Col, weather closed in. The forecast was most unpromising. The two parties waited for two days for weather to improve but it only took a turn for the worse.

At this stage Kohli displayed uncanny judgement and wisely withdrew all climbers and high altitude Sherpas off the mountain. The

unfruitful stay in the high 'deterioration zone' would have not only depleted the labouriously transported precious oxygen, fuel and food, but also would have sapped the energy of the summiters and the support teams.

Everest was to have one of its longest spells of bad weather in April-May. There was virtually a complete white-out on the mountain as the fierce winds continued to howl frighteningly for three weeks. During those agonising days the expedition remained pinned down to the Base Camp for no climber, howsoever skilled and determined, could do anything without having the weather on his side.

Towards the middle of May, the weather at last improved. Without wasting time, the summit and the support parties moved up one after another. After spending a night at the 27,800 feet high summit camp, the first pair Gombu and Cheema stepped on the top of Everest on May 20. Thus Gombu became the first man in the world to have scaled Everest twice.

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Nine men in four successive teams in nine days atop the loftiest pinnacle on earth sums up the story of our third attempt on Everest in 1965. This remained a record for seventeen years.

"Everest '84"

After a gap of nineteen years, the Indian Mountaineering Foundation decided to launch its fourth expedition to Everest. It was estimated to cost between forty and fifty lakh rupees, more than the total expenditure of the first three expeditions. The only justification for undertaking such an expensive venture and that too by the traditional South Col route, was that we wanted to place one or more Indian girls on the hallowed peak. So far, only four women had scaled Everest.

And our girls were straining at the leash to join the female "Everesters' Club."

Colonel D.K. Khullar, Principal, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling, was chosen Leader. The veteran mountaineer Lieut. Col. Prem Chand of Kanchenjunga fame was to be his deputy. The thirteen strong male members included skilled and experienced mountaineers like Major K.I. Kumar, Major Jai Bahuguna, Subedar N.D. Sherpa and HMI's Deputy Director of Field Training, Dorjee Lahtoo.

The female contingent of seven consisted of Dr. Meena Agarwal, an experienced mountaineer, the legendary Chandra Prabha Aitwal, who could be rated amongst the best women mountaineers of the world and, Rekha Sharma and Harshvanti Bisht who like Chandra Prabha had also climbed Nanda Devi in 1981 and were given Arjuna Award. The other three women mountaineers were Rita Gombu, the daughter of the world famous twice-atop-Everester Nawang Gombu, and Tenzing Norgay's successor at the HMI as the Director of Field Training, Sharavati Prabhu and the hitherto unknown Bachendri Pal.

When she was selected for the Everest '84 team, Bachendri had only two and a half years of mountaineering behind her. She was experience-wise the juniormost member of the expedition.

"Everest '84" expedition went via Kathmandu and reached the acclimatisation training camp at Pheriche in the last week of March. On March 26, they received the morale-shattering news that one Sherpa porter of the advance party had been killed in an avalanche while ferrying loads through the ice-fall. This tragedy was followed soon after by another when a kitchen boy collapsed and died due to acclimatisation failure. The main party of the expedition had not yet reached the Base Camp.

The expedition got over this trauma soon and the intrepid young mountaineers forged ahead according to the well-planned strategy.

After the usual ups and downs the expedition was poised to make the ascent in the first week of May. Lack of sufficient number of high

altitude Sherpas in the final stages, however, made it necessary to readjust the tactics on the mountain.

In the first summit attempt on May 9, the veterans, Prem Chand and Chandra Prabha, sacrificed their chance in favour of the younger aspirants and withdrew to the South Col from the summit camp. Unfortunately, Sherpa Sirdar Ang Dorjee's feet were becoming too cold. Fearing frostbite he had to return with Rita Gombu. But the third member on the rope, the very strong climber Phu Dorjee, kept climbing and after abandoning his defective oxygen equipment at South Summit reached the peak at 12.30 p.m. Thus the expedition's first summiter climbed solo and without oxygen from the South Summit.

On account of various unexpected events the climbing and support teams were withdrawn from the higher camps. The Leader was obliged to rehash his ascent efforts. On May 15, the amended plan's first summit team comprising Dorjee Lahtoo, Rattan Singh, Sonam Palzor and Rekha Sharma reached Camp IV at the South Col. The second team consisting of ND, Lopsang and Bachendri Pal with seven Sherpas reached the 24,000 feet Camp III on the Lhotse Face. This party was really strong, fully acclimatised and very confident.

Night of May 15-16 was *Buddha Purnima* (Full-moon) sacred to Buddhists and Hindus alike. Ironically Everest repulsed the mountaineers a second time on this seemingly auspicious night. At 12.30 a.m. a massive serac broke off the higher reaches of Lhotse glacier causing a devastating ice and snow-slide. The ice avalanche came thundering down and within seconds engulfed Camp III, destroying and burying all but one torn tent.

The entire team was virtually written off. One Sherpa had a fractured leg, ND broke a couple of ribs and suffered three head injuries. Nearly every one suffered from some bruises and shattered nerves. The lone female in the camp of nine seasoned Sherpas, Bachendri Pal, had to be snatched virtually out of the jaws of death. Except her head and one arm, her entire body was crushed under tons of ice and frozen snow debris. She felt life ebbing out of her body when her tent-mate Lopsang working furiously dug her out of the icy grave with great difficulty. Mercifully, Bachendri Pal had no injury and

despite her harrowing experience, she was the only member of the party whose nerves were intact.

The casualties were evacuated early next morning to Camp II which was the Leader's advance Base Headquarters. All male members eagerly agreed to be evacuated to the Base Camp. But Bachendri Pal felt that "Durga Ma" had spared her only to climb Everest. With a glow on her chubby face and a glitter in her eyes, she told the Leader that she would only go up. She was the only member of the party who stayed behind at Camp II when she should really have gone down to the Base Camp to recoup if she was going to climb up again.

There was a serious depletion of effective men and material. The prospects looked really gloomy. Even the Sherpa Sirdar appeared to be demoralised and advised the Leader to wind up the expedition.

But, despite the casualties and loss of valuable material, Bachendri's strong conviction in her ability to climb Everest inspired the Leader to have one more try. Using all resources in mountaineers, Sherpas and equipment, Col. Darshan Khullar regrouped his forces and organised two climbing parties including the support element.

After the usual approach to the take off point, the South Col, and exactly a week after the avalanche episode of May 15-16, Bachendri Pal stepped on Everest top at seven minutes past one in the afternoon of May 23, with her rope-mate Ang Dorjee. Ang Dorjee had climbed from the South Col without oxygen. Dorjee Lahtoo and Sonam Palzor followed them to the summit, soon after.

"Everest '84" had placed five persons including the first Indian and world's fifth woman on the highest point on the earth.

A Mountaineering Phenomenon

"A star is born", quipped Col. Khullar, when he heard on the walkie-talkie about Bachendri Pal's prodigious feat. The weather gods may have smiled on the summit team on May 23. At the same time it is true that Bachendri did not reach her goal by luck alone. Col. Khullar considered her one of the fittest members of the expedition. Bachendri had acclimatized so perfectly that heights did not

seem to bother her at all. She could eat and sleep well without recourse to sleeping pills at all the high camps. Even Ang Dorjee was surprised when he found that Bachendri could keep up with him in spite of the fast pace he had set when they left the South Col for the summit bid. They had climbed upto the Summit Camp only in two and half hours. More through ignorance than design, Bachendri Pal had climbed most of the way to the top with oxygen supply on her gas equipment set at two and a half litres per minute instead of the customary four litres. Dorjee Lahtoo had observed the error in adjustment when he overtook Ang Dorjee and Bachendri beyond the South Summit. Her innate strength, stamina and endurance apart, Bachendri had trained herself really hard to meet the challenge of Everest.

Of the nearly a thousand men and women, who have formed the eighty odd expeditions to Everest so far, no one with less than three years of mountaineering experience would have even dreamt of being included in an Everest team, leave alone climbing to the top. India could rightly be proud of Bachendri Pal, the humble Garhwali girl from a poor family. The greenest of all Everesters, Bachendri Pal is truly a mountaineering phenomenon.

Well over 200 mountaineers including seven women have already scaled Everest. Still it remains the biggest draw for the world's mountaineers. No wonder this peak is booked for well into the nineties. The Everest summit has also been reached from all sides and by all but one route. In a span of just one week towards the end of September 1988, a French, a Korean, and an American expeditions have made successful ascent of the highest. On 26th September 1988, a French mountain guide, Marc Batard made the fastest climb of Everest. Climbing non-stop from the Base camp solo and without oxygen, he completed his incredible Everest odyssey in just 22 hours and 32 minutes.

Everest would continue to beckon new aspirants. But no sane mountaineer would consider it a cake-walk. The highest pinnacle on earth remains an unpredictable and most inviting teaser for the bravest and the toughest. That is one reason why the LURE OF EVEREST will endure for ever.

Appendix I

Mount Everest

Mount Everest, the highest point on earth, is situated at latitude $27^{\circ} 59' 16''$ N and longitude $86^{\circ} 55' 40''$ E.

Discovery and Name

The Himalayan peaks were first observed by surveyors between 1849-1855 from distant low-lying stations in the plains of India. The observers could not, however, give individual names to the innumerable peaks that they observed. The peaks now known as Mount Everest and Gauri Shanker were, therefore, originally designated as Peak XV and Peak XX respectively.

The observations of Peak XV (now called Mount Everest) were taken during November-December 1849 and January 1850 from six stations about 175 kms. away from the Mountain. These stations—Jarol, Mirzapur, Janjipati, Ladnia, Harpur and Minai were separated from each other by approximately 30 kms. and were situated at a height of about 230 feet above mean sea level. To make the stations intervisible for triangulation, towers (about 20 to 32 feet high) were built.

The actual rays from the triangulation to the peak were observed by Mr. J.O. Nicolson, using a 24-inch theodolite. In this connection, it is interesting to recall one of the instructions given to Mr. Nicolson. He was asked "to be in the observatory before sunrise and all prepared to commence horizontal angles as soon as it is light. The vertical angles may be taken from 8 to 10 a.m." Considering the season and the unhealthy tracts where the field parties had to camp, it must have been a difficult task.

The computations of the triangulations were carried out by many computers, including Mr. Radhanath Sikhdar and Mr. Hennessey. By 1852 the computations were sufficiently advanced to indicate that the height to Peak XV was greater than that of any other known mountain. The computations were checked and revised and it was not

till 1865 that the determination could be regarded as sufficiently reliable and final.

Meanwhile, considerable thought was given to the question of naming the peak. After an exhaustive enquiry, the then Surveyor General, Sir Andrew Waugh, with the concurrence of his deputy, Col. Henry Thullier and the Chief Computer, Mr. Radhanath Sikhdar, and in consultation with the Royal Geographical Society of London, decided to name the peak after his distinguished predecessor, Sir George Everest, to commemorate his contribution to the geodetic survey of India.

Height

The height computed from the original six observations of 1849-1850 varied from 28,990.4 to 29,026.1 feet, the mean being 29,002 feet. Though the maximum difference between the six values was only about 36 feet, the values suffered from appreciable systematic errors as the coefficients of refraction assumed were high, plumb line deflections were neglected and the datum was not properly fixed. The value of 29,002 feet, though often quoted, was therefore regarded as somewhat vague.

On the basis of further six observations made during 1880-1883 and 1902, Sir Sidney Burrard estimated in 1905 the height of Mount Everest to be 29,141 feet. Even though Sir Sidney assumed a more correct value for the coefficient of refraction, his estimate also is considered vague as the 'geoidal' rise was ignored.

More detailed observations were carried out by the Survey of India during 1952-1954. The computed heights varied from 29,022.8 to 29,038.7 feet, with a scatter of only about 16 feet. The weighted mean value of the height of Mount Everest works out to be 29,028* feet (8,847.734 metres). To quote Mr. Gulatee: "The new value obtained is 29,028 feet which, it is hoped, is not likely to be in error by more than 10 feet."

* Calculations, assuming an 'International Standard Atmosphere (ISA)' at a height of 29,028 feet give the pressure ratio, density ratio (sea level conditions) and the temperature at that height as 0.310 (0.27 to 0.36),

0.385 (0.375 to 0.385) and -42.4° C (-65° C to -6° C) respectively. Figures in brackets denote the rough extremes within which the values may lie. Obviously, the actual conditions at the top of the stupendous snow mass of Everest may be distinctly different.

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Appendix II

Who's Who

BRIGADIER GYAN SINGH : Comes from the Ludhiana district of Punjab. Born in the Mainpuri district of U.P. on April 12, 1915. Educated in Lucknow and joined the 8 Cavalry in September 1936 as a *Sowar*. Commissioned in the Regiment of Artillery in July 1940. Served almost throughout in the Kashmir operations, including the Zoji La operation, in command of a Field Regiment of Artillery. Climbed extensively during this period in connection with reconnaissance duties and other professional work. The appointments he has so far held are: Commandant of the Winter Warfare School, Assistant Commandant of the School of Artillery, Commandant of a Regiment of Artillery and Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General of a Division.

In 1958 Brig Gyan Singh joined the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI), Darjeeling, as Principal. During July-August 1959 he visited Europe, to attend the International Mountaineers' Meet organised by the French National Mountaineering and Ski School in Chamonix and the Mountaineering Jubilee Week at Rosenlau (Switzerland). He later went round mountaineering institutions in Austria, Germany, Belgium and England.

On being selected to lead the expedition to Everest, Brig Gyan Singh organised an Advanced-cum-Pre-Everest Course to the Kabru glacier in October-November 1959.

KEKIL F. BUNSHAH : An Attorney of the Bombay High Court. Was born on March 5, 1930, and educated at St. Xavier's College and Government Law College, Bombay. Went to the Garhwal Hills in 1951 with a New Zealand expedition. He learnt rock-climbing in the Western Ghats. In 1956 he organised a successful expedition to Trishul (23,360 feet) and climbed the peak. On the way back, he attempted Mrigathoni in Garhwal. In 1958 he led the Indian team to Cho-Oyu (28,867 feet), the seventh highest peak in the world. Despite

several setbacks, including an air-crash in which a considerable quantity of equipment and provisions were lost, the death of Maj. N.D. Jayal and a severe gale which destroyed tents and other equipment at Camp II, two members of his team succeeded in reaching the peak. He himself went up to 24,000 feet in support of the summit party.

FLT. LT. A.K. CHOWDHURY: Was born on December 31, 1934. He joined the Joint Services Wing (N.D.A.) in 1952 and was commissioned in the Air Force in January 1956. He attended the Basic Course at the HMI and joined the Nanda Devi expedition (Advanced Course) in 1957 and climbed upto 23,000 feet. In 1959 he went with the Air Force expedition to Chowkhamba (23,420 feet) and reached the top.

NAWANG GOMBU: Belongs to the Solokhumbu district of Nepal. He worked as a Sherpa on the British expedition to Everest in 1953 and went up to 27,000 feet. In 1954 he worked for the American expedition to Makalu. The same year he was appointed Instructor at the HMI and did a mountaineering course in Switzerland. Also qualified in the ski course at Gulmarg. Participated in the Saser Kangri and Nanda Devi expeditions with the Advanced Course parties from the HMI

SONAM GYATSO: Was born on April 1, 1923. Is working on a civil post under the Government of India. Did the first Basic Course from the HMI in 1954 and participated in an Advanced Course to Nanda Devi led by the late Maj. N.D. Jayal. In 1958 took part in the successful Cho-Oyu (26,867 feet) expedition and reached the summit. He attended the Advanced-cum-Pre-Everest Course in 1959.

CAPT. A.B. JUNGALWALA: Was born on December 26, 1933. Was commissioned in the Gorkha Rifles. During the summer of 1954, Capt. Jungalwala trekked to the "Valley of Flowers" and the Hemkund region of the Garhwal Himalayas. He attended the Basic Course at the HMI in 1958 and the Advanced Course in 1959.

INST. LT. M.S. KOHLI: Was born on December 11, 1931, in Haripur in Hazara District (N.W.F.P.), West Pakistan. After Partition, he migrated to Delhi and took the M.A. (Hons.) degree from Delhi University in 1953. Founded the "International Youth Organi-

sation", which has branches in India and six other countries. Joined the Navy in March 1954 as a Commissioned Instructor Officer, and was placed in-charge of the "Deep Sea Scouts" Organisation of the Service. Lt. Kohli started his mountaineering career in April 1956 by undergoing the Basic Course at the HMI. Soon after, he joined the Advanced Course and went with the Eastern Karakoram expedition led by the late Maj. Jayal. In April-May 1959, he organised and led the all-Naval expedition to Nanda Kot (22,510 feet) in which he, along with K.P. Sharma, Chief Yeoman of Signals, succeeded in reaching the summit. He participated in the Advanced-cum-Pre-Everest Course in 1959.

CAPT. N. KUMAR: Was born on December 8, 1933. He attended the World Scout Jamboree in Paris in 1947 at the age of 14. In 1950, he joined the Joint Services Wing (N.D.A.) and was commissioned in June 1954 into the Kumaon Rifles. Capt. Kumar successfully completed the Advanced and Instructors' course at the Winter Warfare School, Gulmarg in 1956 and participated in the Himachal Winter Sports in 1957. He attended the Basic and Advanced Courses at the Army School of Physical Training and obtained a high grading in both. In February 1958 he attended the Basic Course at the HMI and, a month later, led the successful Army and Naval expedition to Trishul (23,360 feet). In 1959, he attended the Advanced-cum-Pre-Everest Course.

B.D. MISRA: An Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics at Saugor University, was born on January 18, 1933. He obtained a post-graduate degree from Allahabad University and served there for three years before joining Saugor University. Has been to Rupkund in Garhwal as a member of the Allahabad University Mountaineering Club and later to the Sukram and Sunperdhunga Glacier. He has also been to Gangotri. Has done the Basic Course at the HMI and attended the Advanced-cum-Pre-Everest Course in 1959.

DA NAMGYAL: Belongs to the Sôlu-Khumbu district of Nepal. As a Sherpa, he participated in expeditions to Pumori, Nanda Devi, Deodunga (Kulu Valley); Everest with the Swiss in 1952 and with the British in 1953, and Annapoorna with the Japanese in 1953. In 1954,

Namgyal was appointed Instructor at the HMI and later received mountaineering training in Switzerland. He has been to Mount Kamet, Nanda Devi and Saser Kangri on Advanced Courses and climbed Everest upto 27,400 feet.

R. VIKRAM SINGH: Was born in Barabanki (U.P.) in 1929. Studied at the Doon School, Dehra Dun, and later at Stanford University, California. A scientist in the National Physical Laboratory, Vikram Singh has climbed around Bunder Punch. In 1958 he participated in the first ascent of Mrigathoni (22,490 feet) in Garhwal.

ANG TEMBA: Belongs to the Thamy village of Solu-Khumbu district in Nepal. He worked as a Sherpa on expeditions to Ferrani with the Swiss in 1949, Nanga Parbat with the British, Chowkhamba with the French in 1952, Everest with the Swiss in 1952 and with the British in 1953, and Makalu with the Americans in 1954. On the opening of the HMI Temba was appointed Instructor and later did a training course in Switzerland. He climbed Kamet with the first Advanced Course of the HMI.

C.P. VOHRA: Belongs to the Mirpur district of Jammu and Kashmir. Was born in August 1934. He obtained his M.Sc. (Geology) degree from J&K University in 1955, and has been working in the Geological Survey of India since 1956. During 1957-59, he worked on some Kumaon glaciers. He did his Basic Course at the HMI and took part in the Advanced-cum-Pre-Everest Course at the HMI 1959.

FLT. LT. N.S. BHAGWANANI: Belongs to the Sukkur district of Sind, West Pakistan. Was born on November 14, 1929. He took the M.B.B.S degree from the Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam in 1952 and joined the Medical Branch of the Air Force in March 1953. After qualifying as a paratrooper in 1954, Flt. Lt. Bhagwanani commanded a para-medical team for five years. He carried out some high-altitude jumps at Gulmarg and in July 1955 trekked to the Jamnotri glacier in Eastern Garhwal with the Air Force Trekking Society. In 1956 he qualified at the Basic Course at the Winter Warfare School and in December 1957-January 1958 led the medical mission for flood relief work in Ceylon. In 1959 he participated in the Air Force expedition to Chowkhamba and Nilkanth.

CAPT. S.K. DAS: Was born at Khardaha, near Calcutta, on April 2, 1927. He took the M.B.B.S. degree from Calcutta University in 1955 and was commissioned in the Army Medical Corps in 1957. Capt Das has done trekking in upper Garhwal and has climbed upto 21,000 feet. Has undergone a course in Physiology in the Defence Science Laboratory, Delhi, and is working as a doctor and physiologist at the HMI. He did his Basic and Advanced Courses at the Institute during 1959.

C.V. GOPAL: Was born in December 1927. Graduated from the Madras Christian College and later studied Cinematography at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. He has been working in the Documentary Section of the Films Division (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) since 1952. He took part in the Pre-Everest Course as a Cameraman.

FLT. LT. A.J.S. GREWAL: Belongs to Sangrur District (Punjab). Was born in 1929. He took his Master's degree from Ludhiana in 1950, and obtained a Diploma in Journalism in 1951. Commissioned in the Air Force in 1953, Flt.Lt. Grewal did the Basic Course in mountaineering from the HMI in 1957 and took part in the Advanced-cum-Pre-Everest Course in 1959.

LT. S.C. NANDA: Was born on February 2, 1937. Did his schooling at Dehra Dun and joined the Joint Services Wing (N.D.A.) in July 1953. He was commissioned in June 1957 in the Corps of Signals. He attended the Basic Course at the HMI.

S.U. SHANKAR RAO: Was born on November 18, 1922. He took his B.Sc. (Hons.) degree in Chemistry in 1944. Since then he has been working in the Indian Meteorological Department. He had no previous experience of climbing.

SOHAN SINGH: Was born on August 10, 1911. He took the B.A. degree from the Punjab University in 1932 and joined service in the office of the Chief Controller of Stores, Simla in May 1935. He organised an expedition to Panch Chuli in 1952 and trekked to Kailash and Mansarovar in June-July 1952. He did his Basic Course at the HMI in 1958.

DHANBIR RAI: A Civil officer of the Nepal Government. Was attached to the expedition as a Liaison Officer on behalf of the Nepal Government.

NAIK BALAKRISHNAN: Born on October 3, 1923, in Trichur in Kerala State. Joined the Indian Army in August 1943, and is attached to a Signals Regiment.

SIGNALMAN OM PRAKASH VAID : Born on August 15, 1937, in Gummer in the Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh. Joined the Indian Army in June 1955 and is attached to a Signals Company.

Appendix III

A Chronology

September, 1959	Brigadier Gyan Singh, Principal of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, nominated as Leader and Mr. Keki Bunshah as Deputy Leader of the Expedition.
Oct.-Nov., 1959	Pre-Everest Course held at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute on the Kabru ice-fall.
16 Nov., 1959	A 20 member team, including 13 climbing and 7 non-climbing members, announced.
20 Feb., 1960	The team assembles in New Delhi.
27 Feb., 1960	Nearly 600 packages of equipment leave Delhi by road for Lucknow.
2 March, 1960	The team leaves Delhi by train for Jaynagar.
4 March, 1960	The team arrives in Jaynagar on the Indo-Nepalese border.
6 March, 1960	The Expedition leaves Jaynagar and the "Everest March" begins.
7 March, 1960	The Expedition arrives at Chisapani at the foot-hills of the Himalayas.
15 March, 1960	The Expedition has its first view of the Everest massif from Garma village.
18 March, 1960	The Expedition reaches Khari Khola in the Khumbu district.
22 March, 1960	The Expedition arrives at Namche Bazar, the last out-post on the trade-route to Tibet.
23 March, 1960	The Expedition camps at Pangboche to begin acclimatisation.
5 April, 1960	The Base Camp is set up at the foot of the Khumbu ice-fall at a height of about 18,000 feet.
10 April, 1960	The leading party sets up Camp I at a height of 19,200 feet on the Khumbu ice-fall.

13 April, 1960 The move to the Base Camp completed.

15 April, 1960 Camp II set up at 20,000 feet.

17 April, 1960 The Expedition crosses the Khumbu ice-fall and sets up Camp III at a height of 21,200 feet.

19 April, 1960 Camp IV set up at the foot of the Lhotse Glacier at a height of 22,400 feet.

2 May, 1960 Camp V set up at a height of 24,000 feet.

9 May, 1960 Camp VI set up on the South Col, at a height of 26,000 feet as the final take-off base.

14 May, 1960 Strong and chilly winds on the Lhotse Face and intermittent snowfall compel the climbers to withdraw.

19 May, 1960 Brigadier Gyan Singh returns to the Base Camp on account of illness.

23 May, 1960 The first summit team consisting of Nawang Gombu, Sonam Gyatso and Narinder Kumar supported by nine Sherpas reaches the South Col.

24 May, 1960 The first summit team succeeds in establishing Camp VII at a height of 27,600 feet on the south ridge of Everest. The supporting team of seven Sherpas returns to the South Col leaving the three climbers at Camp VII.

25 May, 1960 The first summit team attempts to climb the peak and reaches a height of 28,300 feet, 700 ft short of the peak, but is compelled to withdraw on account of bad weather.

26 May, 1960 The second summit party, consisting of Ang Temba, M.S. Kohli and C.P. Vohra, awaits at the South Col for the weather to improve to make an attempt to climb the peak but is ordered to return because of extremely bad weather.

27 May, 1960 The first summit party returns to the Base Camp. The second summit party returns to the Advance Base Camp.

29 May, 1960 The Expedition assembles at the Base Camp.

3 June, 1960 The Expedition reaches Namche Bazar on the return journey to Kathmandu.

17 June, 1960 The Expedition arrives in Kathmandu.

20 June, 1960 The Expedition returns to New Delhi by air from Kathmandu.

Appendix IV

Mountaineering Terms

ARETE	Sharp ascending ridge of a mountain.
AVALANCHE	Large mass of snow and ice sliding down a mountain slope.
BALACLAVA	A woollen cap which covers the head and cheeks right down to the neck.
BELAY	To secure a rope by winding it round a projection; a firmly planted ice-axe may be used for the purpose. To make secure the ascent or descent of a climber with a rope.
BIVOUAC	Temporary encampment without tents.
CAIRN	A small heap of stones serving as a landmark on a mountain, generally on a pass, to indicate a route.
COL	Depression in a mountain-chain; pass.
CORNICE	A mass of snow or ice overhanging a ridge.
COULOIR	Steep gully or furrow of ice, snow or rock on mountain-side.
CRAMPON	Metal hook with spikes fitted to climbing boots to give a better hold on ice or hard snow.
CREVASSÉ	Deep fissure in a glacier or snow-field.
CWM	(Also Combe or Coomb) A large cauldron or basin in a heavily-glaciated region.
EIDERDOWN	Down feathers of Eider duck. A very warm and light material, used in high-altitude clothing.
GLACIER	River of ice formed by the accumulation or consolidation of snow.
GLISSADE	Sliding descent over a steep slope of snow or ice.
ICE-AXE	Mountaineer's axe mainly used for cutting steps on ice and snow and belaying.
ICE-FALL	Steep frozen waterfall; cascading ice in the "river" of a glacier.

KARABINER	A metal spring-loaded clip which can be fixed to a rope or piton to facilitate ascent or descent.
MASSIF	A compact portion of a mountain range containing one or two summits.
METAFUEL	Solid fuel available in the form of white tablets used in special stoves. Burns with a light blue flame like methylated spirit.
MORAINE	Debris carried down or deposited by a glacier.
PITON	Metal spike which can be driven into a rock or ice for fixing a rope.
RAPPEL	An act or method of moving down a steep incline with the help of a rope.
SCREE	Mountain slope covered with small loose stones that slide down when trodden.
SERAC	Tall pinnacle of ice, usually associated with icefalls and glaciers
SPUR	Rib or lateral projection of rock.

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The expedition received assistance from a large number of individuals, firms and organisations in India and abroad. Some of them have already been mentioned in the text of this book. There are many others mentioned below who have been of special assistance to the expedition in several ways, and the members of the expedition owe a debt of gratitude to all of them. There are still others who have rendered valuable assistance, but may have been left out.

Individuals

Lt. Col. H.C. Abraham

Flt. Lt. S.K. Aggarwal, Indian Air Force; Embarkation Headquarters

Mr. R.D. Bhudwar, Forest Research Institute, Dehradun
Group Captain S.W. Bobb, Indian Air Force

Rear Admiral A.K. Chatterji, Deputy Chief of Naval Staff

Mr. H. Corra, Filmo Depot, Hongkong

Mr. Dawa, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling

Major A.J. Dewan (Retd.), Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling

Mr. C. Douglas

Mr. J.A. Gaitonde, Bombay

Mr. B.R. Gulati, Ministry of Defence

Mr. Gurung, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling

Commodore M.K. Heble, Commodore East Coast, Indian Navy

Naik Harbans Singh, Ordnance Depot, Delhi

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Mr. Navnit Parekh, Bombay

Miss R. Price, Bombay

Lt. General B.M. Rao, Director General, Armed Forces Medical Service

Instructor Captain K.S. Rao, Naval Headquarters

Mr. Satish Rao, Bombay

Mr. S.J. Sahaney, Director General of Ordnance Factories

Group Captain Z.A. Shah, Indian Air Force

Rear Admiral D. Shankar, Controller General of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence

Mr. K.P. Sharma, Chief Yeoman of Signals, Indian Navy

Mr. Dhyan Singh, Bombay

Rear Admiral B.S. Soman, Flag Officer, Indian Navy, Bombay

Superintendent, Harness & Saddlery Factory, Kanpur

Superintendent, Ordnance Clothing Factory, Shahjahanpur

Superintendent, Metal and Steel Factory, Ishapur

Superintendent, Gun and Shell Factory, Ishapur

Mrs. Pem Pem Tshering, Secretary, Sherpa Climbers Association, Darjeeling

Dr. R.S. Verma, Defence Science Laboratory, Delhi

Mrs. D.J. Wadia, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling
Works Manager, Harness & Saddlery Factory, Kanpur

Mr. Yonjan, Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling

Madame M. Morin, Federation Francaise de La Montagne, Paris

Mr. L. Boulat, Paris

Dr. Jurg Marmet, Monclair, New Jersey, United States

Firms and Organizations

Abbrahim Currim & Sons, Bombay	Umbrellas
Bata Shoe Co., Ltd., Calcutta	Climbing and approach march boots
Bengal Waterproof Co., Calcutta	Air-mattresses and tent flooring
Bombay Housing Mart, Bombay	Nylon socks
Boroughs Wellcome & Co., Delhi	Medicines
Bright Brothers (P) Ltd., Bombay	Polythene Bread-boxes and jars
British Drug House (India) Private Ltd., Bombay	Medicines
Caltex (India) Ltd. New Delhi	Kerosene Oil
Ciba Pharma (Private) Ltd., Bombay	Medicines
D&P Products, Bombay	Tinned vegetables and fruits
Dumex (Private) Ltd., Bombay	Medicines
Messrs. European Supplies Org., Paris	Services
Favre-Leuba Watch Co., Switzerland	Wrist watches
Gami Cameras and Film Association, Milan, Italy	Cameras
Glaxo Laboratory (India) Private Ltd., Bombay	Medicines and Glucose 'D'
Godrej Co. (Private) Ltd., New Delhi	Steel folding chairs and locks
Imperial Chemical Industries (Private) Ltd., Bombay	Alkathene & Polythene
Imperial Tobacco Co. Ltd., Calcutta	Cigarettes
Indian Coffee Board	Coffee
Indian Oxygen Ltd., Calcutta	Oxygen & testing facilities
J.L. Morrison Sons & Jones (India) Private Ltd., Bombay	Medicines
Kaira District Cooperative Milk Producers Ltd., Anand	Milk powder

Kodak Ltd., Bombay	Films
Lederle Laboratory (India)	Medicines
Private Ltd., Atul, Bulsar	Medicines
May and Baker (India)	Medicines
Private Ltd., Atul Bulsar	
Metal Box (Private) Ltd., Bombay	Jerrycans
National Carbide Ltd., New Delhi	Torches & batteries
Noble Stationery Mart, Bombay	Stationery
Parke Davis (India) Private Ltd., Bombay	Medicines
Pfizer (Revisions Pharmaceutical Works), Bombay	Medicines
Philips (India) Ltd., New Delhi	Radio receivers
Philips Research Laboratory, Eindhoven, Holland	Transistor frequen- cy modulated radio-telephone sets
Prabhat Stove Co. Private Ltd., Bombay	Primus stoves, Petromax & Hurricane lanterns
Pressure Cookers and Appliances (Private) Ltd., Bombay	Hawkins Pressure: Cookers
Rallis India Ltd., Pharmaceutical Division, Bombay	Medicines
Sandoz Products (Private) Ltd., New Delhi	Medicines
Soyabean Council of America New York, U.S.A.	Soyabean products
Tea Board, North Zone, New Delhi	Tea
Messrs. Thorens-Riviera, Switzerland	Riviera shavers
Victory Flask Co., Bombay	Thermos flasks and water bottles

Ministries & Departments of the Government of India

Ministry of Scientific Research & Cultural Affairs

Ministry of Defence

Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting

Films Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting

All India Radio.

Ministry of Finance

Indian Army, Navy & Air Force

Indian Railways

Indian Customs



PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & BROADCASTING
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

